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GREEK THEMES IN MODERN MUSICAL SETTINGS

PART II
MUSIC TO THE ALCESTIS

BY

ALBERT A. STANLEY

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

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1924

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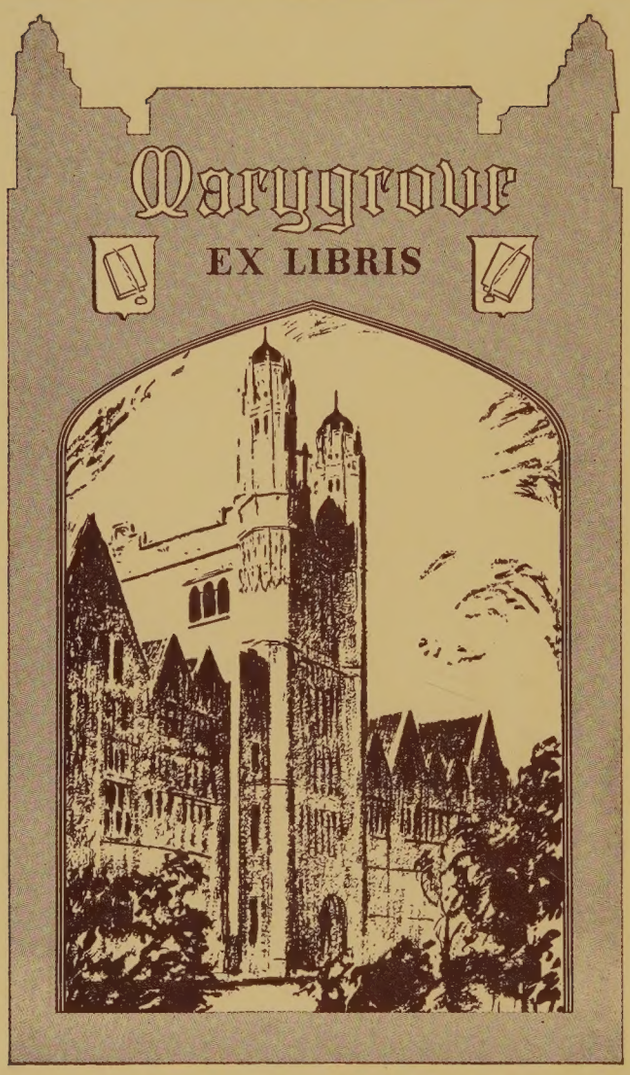
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PART II

MUSIC TO THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES WITH ENGLISH TEXT

ALCESTIS

No University of Michigan tradition seems to be more firmly established than the Senior Girls' Play, given each year at Commencement.

As the year 1912 was of unusual importance in the history of the University, the young ladies of the graduating class, inspired by the preparations for Commencement, determined to present the tragedy of *Alcestis* by Euripides as their contribution. For reasons apparent to those who are conversant with the trend of modern education, an English translation was substituted for the original text. The version chosen was one adapted and arranged for amateur performance in girls' schools by Elsie Fogerty, and published by S. Sonnenschein in London in 1902. With the exception of the chorus and solo in our selection No. 4, and three lines in No. 9, which were translated by A. S. Way, the translation by P. Potter was used, with a few verbal changes.

In the interest of brevity, the *deus ex machina* at Michigan in his editorial capacity made a number of omissions in the text, some of them of a rather drastic nature. With the lack of foresight characteristic of students as a class, irrespective of sex, the committee in charge of the undertaking did not consider the difficulty of the settings of the choral odes they had chosen,[1] until it became apparent that, with the time at their disposal, it would be impossible to make adequate preparation.

The musical settings to the *Alcestis* in the following pages were written therefore rather hurriedly, in response to an urgent request to "help us out." In view of the restrictions of time, and the obvious limitations of a chorus in the formation of which membership in a college graduating class was considered a suffi-

[1] The music referred to, composed by Henry Gadsby, was the setting employed by Miss Fogerty. In its composition the resources of the modern orchestra were employed and four-part harmony was much in evidence in the choruses. In another setting of the *Alcestis* the composer, Dr. C. H. Lloyd, relied upon the flute, clarinet, and harp for the instrumental accompaniment, and for the most part the choruses were sung in unison. Gadsby's setting was based on P. Potter's English translation, while the Greek text was employed by Lloyd. The latter setting, irrespective of the quality of the music, was intrinsically superior.

cient qualification, the music was kept very simple; in the main it was based on the essentially Greek melodic formulae that had proved their effectiveness in the music to *Sappho and Phaon.* Although the music was written for female voices, it is equally adapted for male singers. Since it was based on an English translation, it cannot by any process of manipulation be adapted to the original text.

The performance was given on the evening of June 24, 1912, and was received with great enthusiasm. The properly Hellenic ὄρχηστρα type of stage, an extension from the massive portico of the Alumni Memorial Hall, and the out-of-door environment, contributed in no small degree to the effect produced, although the element of novelty is not without its lure to an academic as well as to a lay audience.

The instrumental accompaniments and special instrumental numbers were scored for flute, clarinet, and harp, the performers being concealed by a screen of boughs at the left of the stage. As a precautionary measure the composer presided at a "baby-grand" pianoforte, which was substituted for the harp. This procedure has much to commend it, especially in productions by amateurs, as the singers can thereby be better controlled. As amateurs generally resent thorough preparation, the more incisive impact of this instrument is a "very present help in time of trouble." When the preparation has been so thorough that automatically everything proceeds smoothly, the harp should be used as more in accord with Hellenic tradition. It must be said that on this occasion, owing to the intelligent guidance of a chorus-leader who possessed unusual dramatic and musical qualifications, but little prompting was required, and the choruses, sung with spirit and feeling, admirably fulfilled their ancient function.

For the guidance of those who may contemplate the performance of this drama, a few explanations of a general character are here given.

First of all the tempo marks, especially the metronomic, and the generally accepted marks of expression, are suggestive rather than arbitrary. The choruses must be sung with a rather slow movement and with great dignity, somewhat after the manner of the Anglican chant. Accented syllables or words are underlined in the score, and should be rigidly observed, even when they are independent of the metrical accent indicated by the time-signa-

ture. Occasionally, measures will be found in which there are but few words, and such are not always to be given the same amount of time as the longer; for all purely musical considerations must be subordinated to the dramatic import of the text, which also governs the evolutions of the chorus. Although the music is notated with accurately defined rhythmical schemes, in many cases these rhythms must be interpreted with elasticity rather than with rigidity, for the reason already stated.

The flute parts in most of the numbers are written an octave higher than in Greek practice, as otherwise they would not be effective, especially in the open air. By doubling, these parts might be played in the lower octave, but at the risk of disaster, excepting when played by professionals.

As these observations apply to performances of Greek music generally, we may now mention some specific details.

No. 1, so far as the music is concerned, presents no difficulties. The same may be said also of No. 2, excepting that the final measures must be sung with a great deal of feeling, as the text requires.

In the instrumental introduction to No. 1, a Dorian tetrachord, read upwards, forms the initial *motif*. In the same number, following the words *He comes, the ruthless tyrant Death*, a clarinet solo based on the chromatic tetrachord (*τετράχορδον χρωματικόν*) forms a short interlude.

The possibilities of this tetrachordal form are well-nigh infinite. Through changes of mode, enharmonic equivalents, and the employment of the devices at the command of the routined composer, it can appear in so many transformations and is so plastic that it is worthy of the attention of those modern writers who, like the ancient Athenians, are ever on the search for novelty.[1]

In No. 3, the (*f′*) by the chorus must be rigidly maintained against the varied harmonizations which interpret the changes

[1] The attempts of modernist composers in the direction of what they call "subtle realism," leads one to wonder whether eventually they will not utilize the enharmonic tetrachord, *τετράχορδον ἐναρμόνικον*. There are great possibilities of subtlety in this tetrachord — with its two quarter-tones and major third — that might be realized in delicate orchestral settings of subjects bordering on the unseen world. For example, muted violins in the higher octaves divided into three or four parts, and sustaining chords, played *ppp*, would form a fairy-like background, against which a solo violin could set forth a series of phrases based on this unusual tetrachordal succession.

of sentiment. The tempo must be as rigidly maintained as the pitch, if this example of a monotone is to be effective.

As musically the *Lament of Eumelus* (No. 4) is in some ways the most important number in the whole composition, it must be sung by a professional, or, at all events, by a well-trained singer. Such numbers were always sung by a professional in Greece. If the one who assumes this rôle has not the necessary musical qualifications the music must be assigned to an artist who can be so placed in the vicinity of the bier as to make the illusion complete. In that case Eumelus will kneel before the bier with back to the audience. This plan was successful at the Michigan performance.

At the close of No. 5, the setting marked *B* is to be preferred, provided that it is sung by well-trained singers. As the choir is invisible, academic considerations need not govern the choice of singers. Failing such a choir, *A* would be the wiser choice.

In No. 6, the section in 5–4 time must be sung slowly, only the first note in the measure receiving an accent. At the conclusion of the section beginning *O thou unhappy, nobly daring woman*, the chromatic tetrachord appears in both a descending and ascending sequence, the first given by the flute, the second by the clarinet, the two so combining as to enforce the plasticity already noted.

In the introductory instrumental section of No. 8, the Dorian and chromatic tetrachords are used in combination and the significant excerpt from the Hymn to Apollo employed in *Sappho and Phaon* reveals a wealth of melodic suggestion. This number, ὑπόρχημα, is not a dance in the modern sense. It consists of interweaving figures carried out in graceful gliding movements, but not danced. A competent director can easily work out a proper scheme of evolution.

The composer calls attention to the serious lapse from grace shown in the last phrase of this chorus, which is formed from a whole-toned scale leading into a more flagrant departure from the rule of action stated in the introductory remarks to *Sappho and Phaon*, that is, the series of augmented triads in the final measures. They are justified by the effect produced, but by no process of reasoning can they be called Greek.

No. 9 is sung as the chorus makes its exit. It may be necessary to counter-march if the first section is repeated. This num-

ber demands a well-balanced, full-voiced chorus to do it justice. Provided the stage favors such a procedure, a supplementary chorus may be stationed behind the scenes, or at the sides, in order that the necessary sonority may be attained.

From the foregoing it will be seen that great responsibility falls on the director. By a careful study of recognized authorities, he will be able to determine the movements of the chorus, and so drill the participants that there shall be perfect coördination and, above all, naturalness of movement. Evidently, the size of the chorus and of the orchestral stage will be determining factors, and may necessitate omissions in some of the choral settings. Such changes cannot be anticipated by the composer and must be left to the discretion of the guiding spirit; but all such changes should, if possible, be made the subject of consultation with the composer. Otherwise there could easily be much to regret. Theatrical experience is helpful but not more so than sympathetic acquaintance with the classics.

This suggests that months instead of weeks should be given to the preparation of any one of these great masterpieces, in order that all who take part may so comprehend the technical structure of the drama, so appreciate the beauty of its diction, and be so moved by its dramatic import, that, when presented, it may appear to be life rather than literature, nature rather than art. To attempt to give musical expression to the lyric and dramatic moments of a work studied in such a manner would be worthy of the best efforts of any composer of intelligence and artistic conscience.

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[1] The lines refer to the Greek text. The page numbers, except where otherwise noted, refer to the English translation in *Everyman's Library* (J. M. Dent & Son, London and New York, 1911); though this translation is not closely followed, it is easily procured and gives the context and omitted lines in a form convenient for reference.

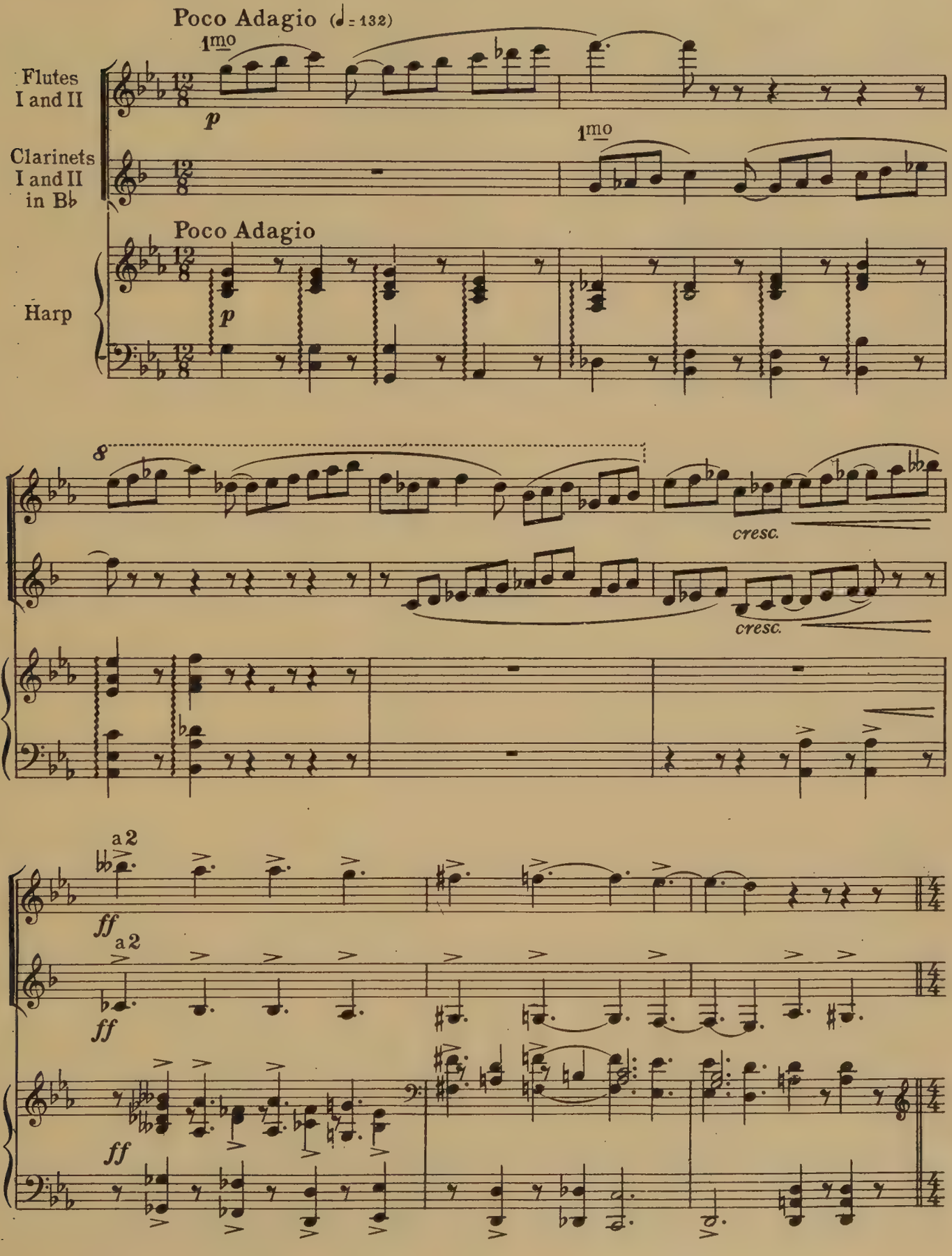
[2] The page numbers refer to A. S. Way's translation (G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York). In No. 9 the first three lines are taken from the same source.

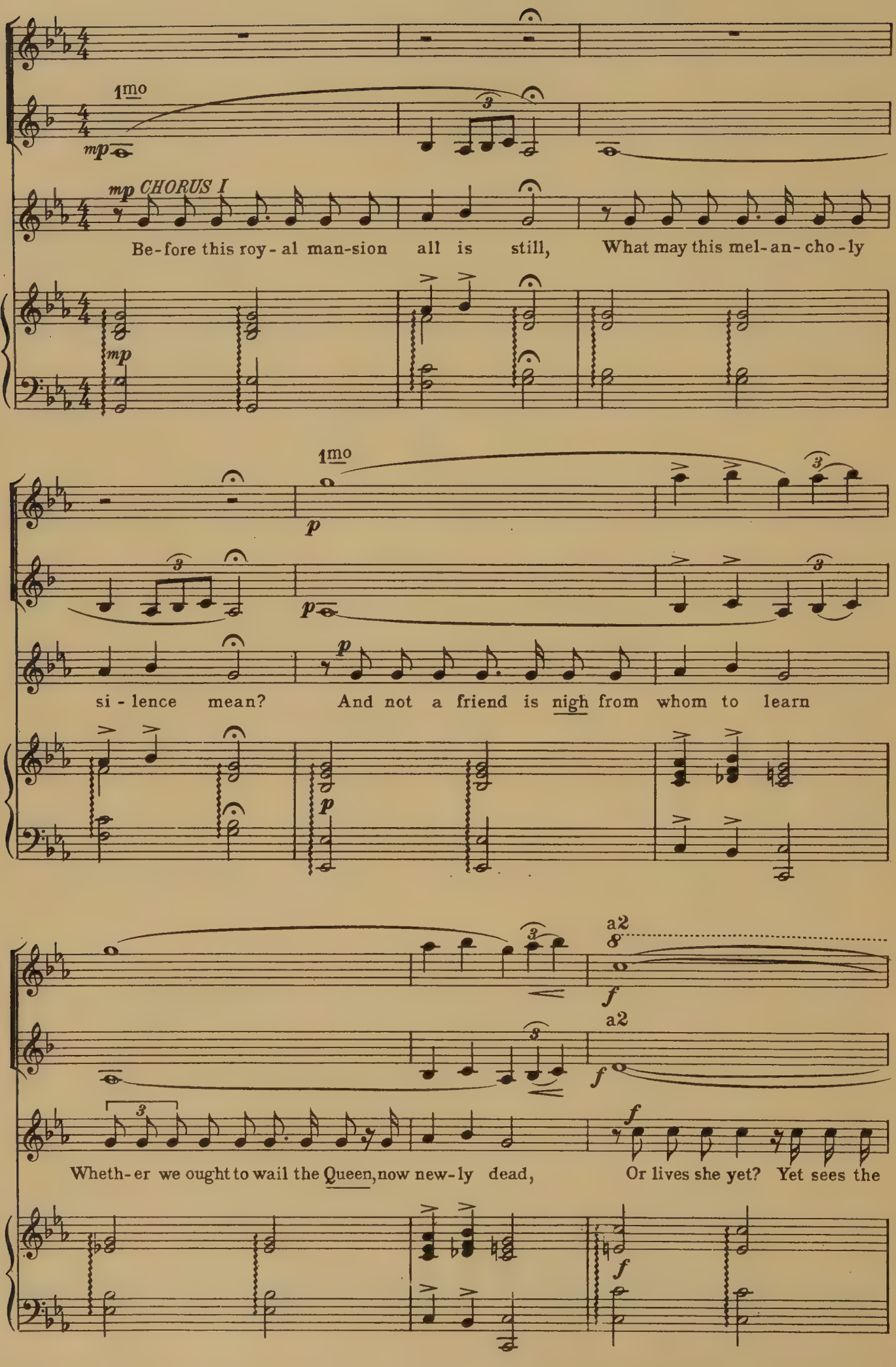
№1. Entrance of Chorus

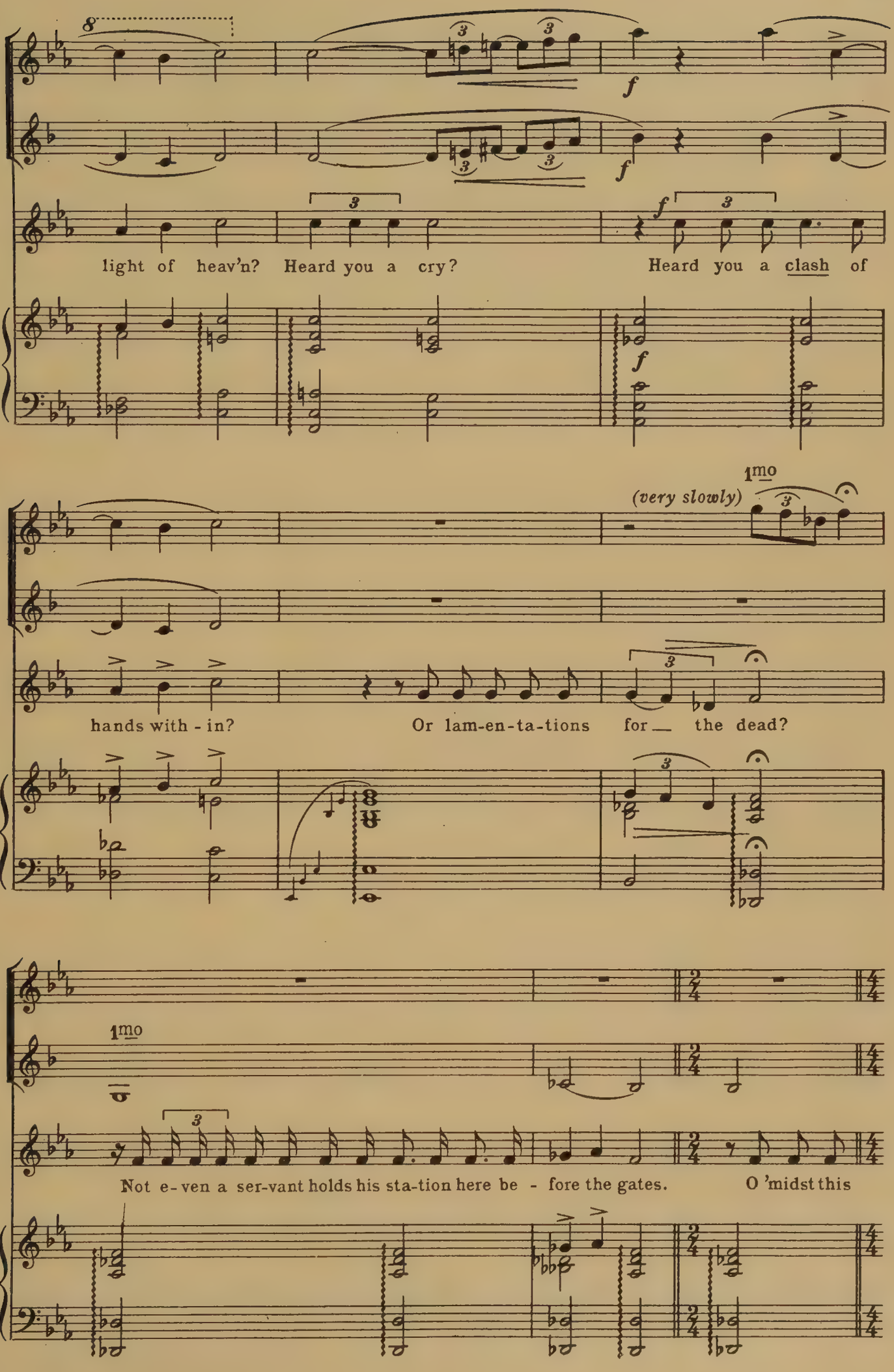
BEFORE THIS ROYAL MANSION ALL IS STILL

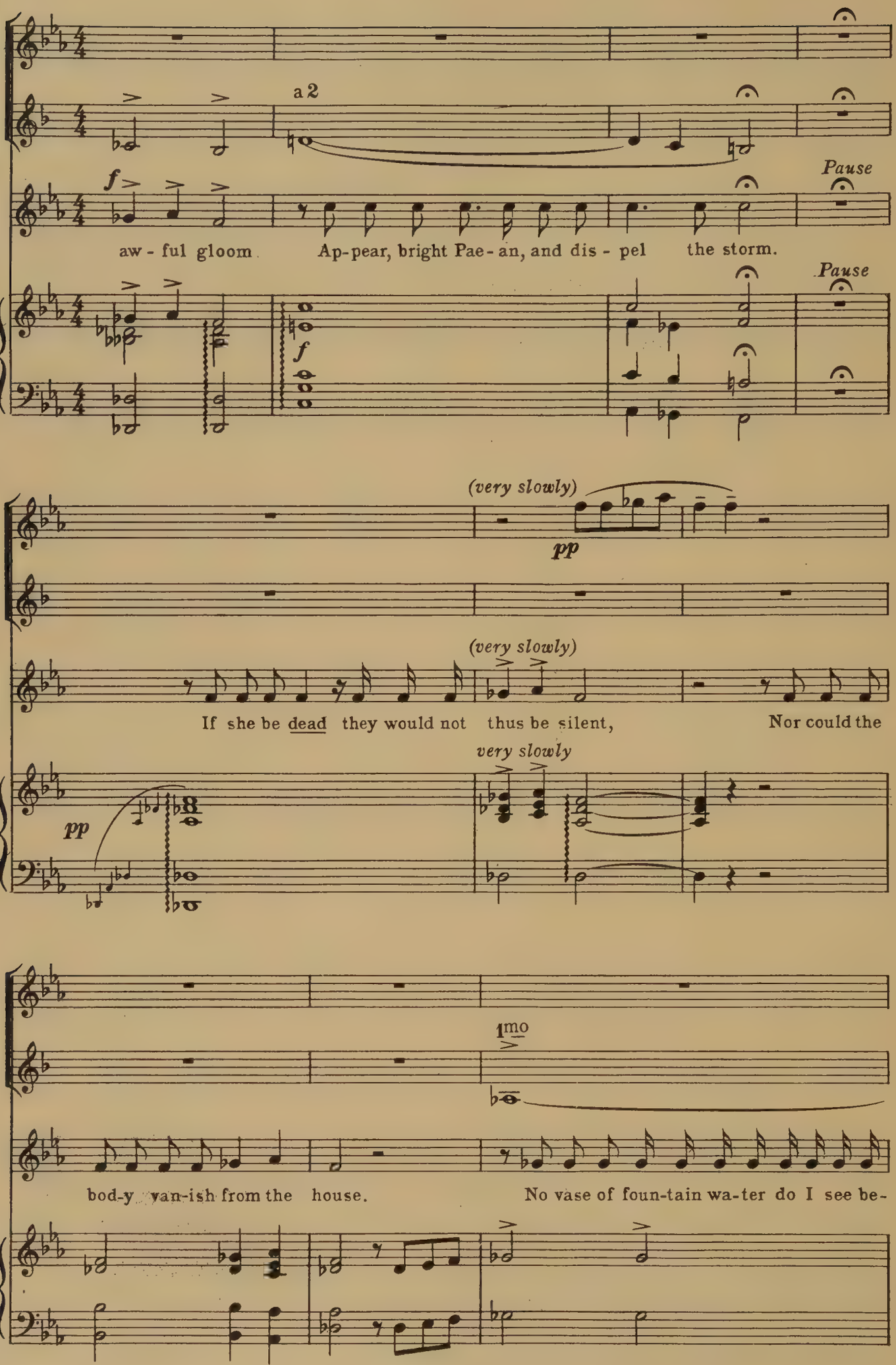
THANATOS:— "Talk on, talk on, no profit shalt thou win —
That head, whose hair this sword shall sanctify."

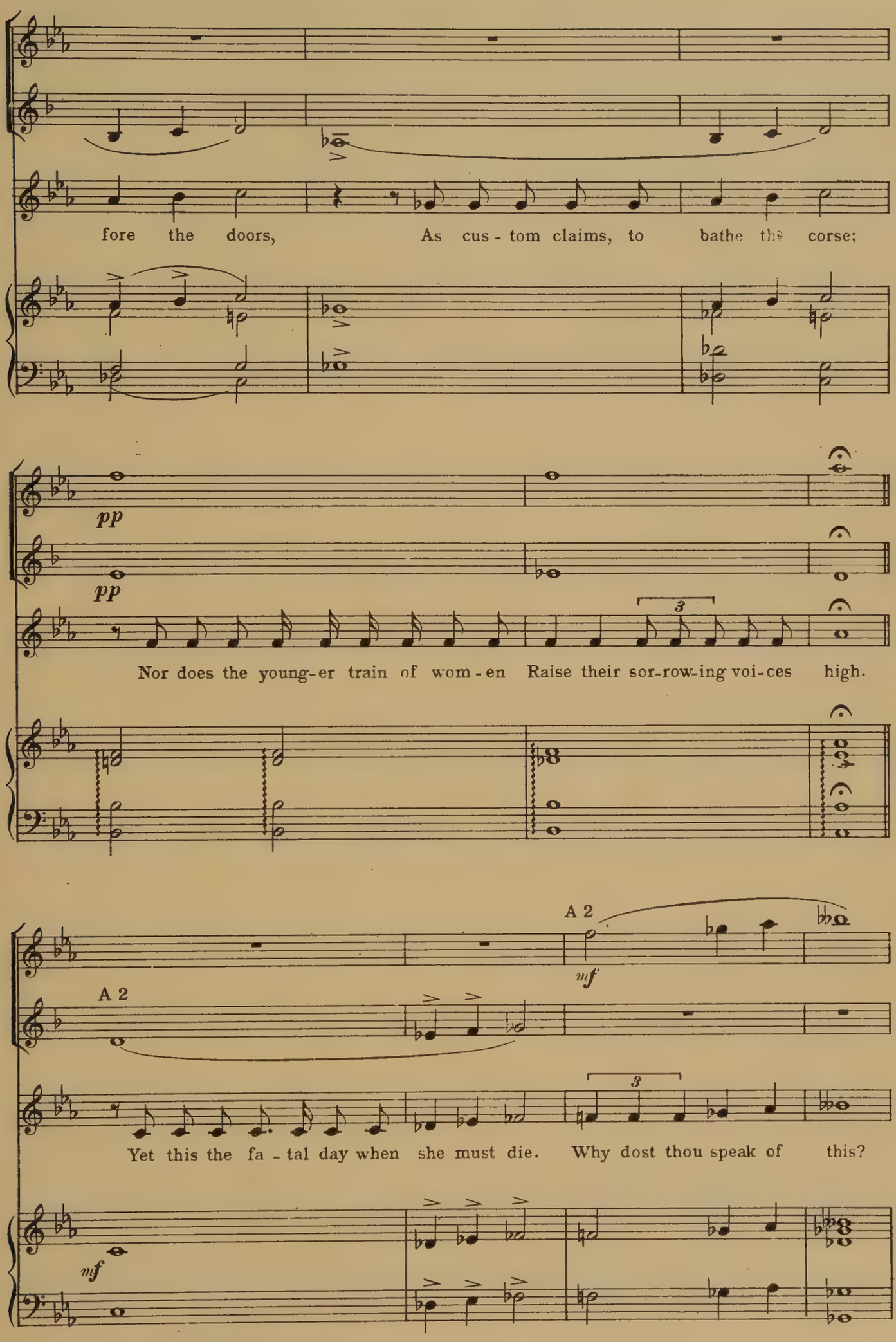
(Thunder, lightning, music. The light gradually dawns.)

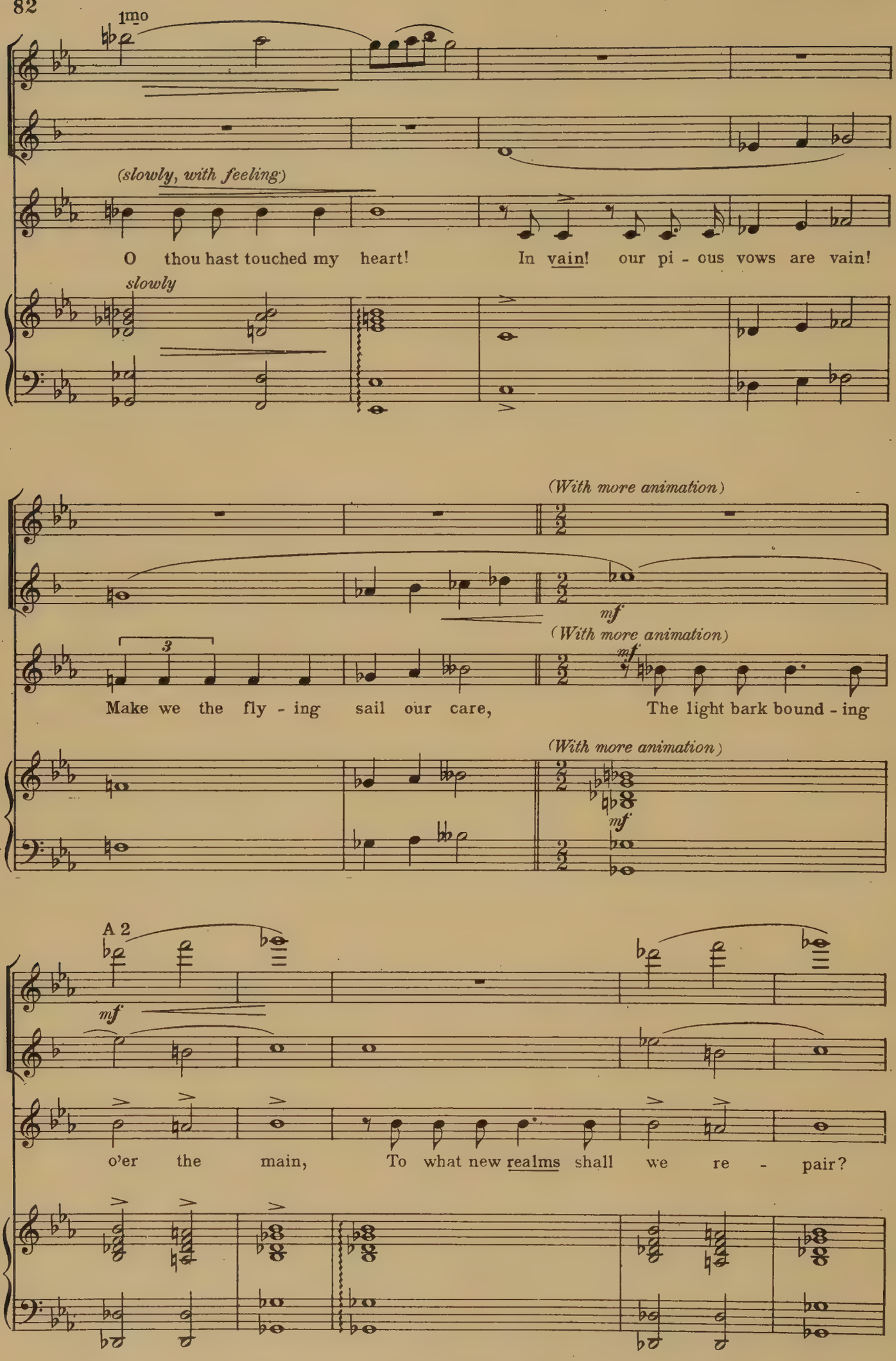


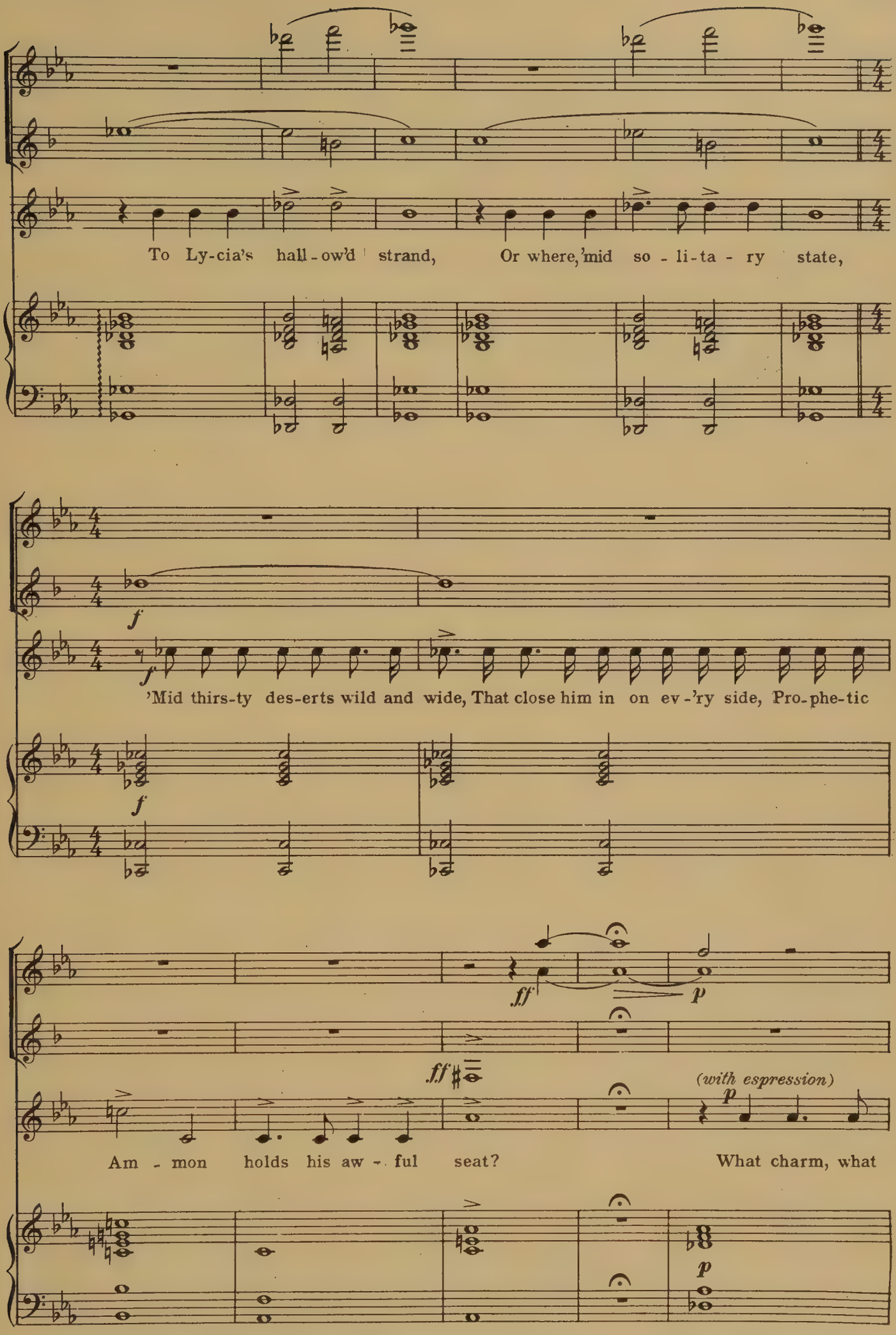

1mo
mp
mp CHORUS I
Be-fore this roy-al man-sion all is still, What may this mel-an-cho-ly
mp
1mo
p
si-lence mean? And not a friend is nigh from whom to learn
p
p
a2
f
a2
f
Wheth-er we ought to wail the Queen, now new-ly dead, Or lives she yet? Yet sees the
f
f

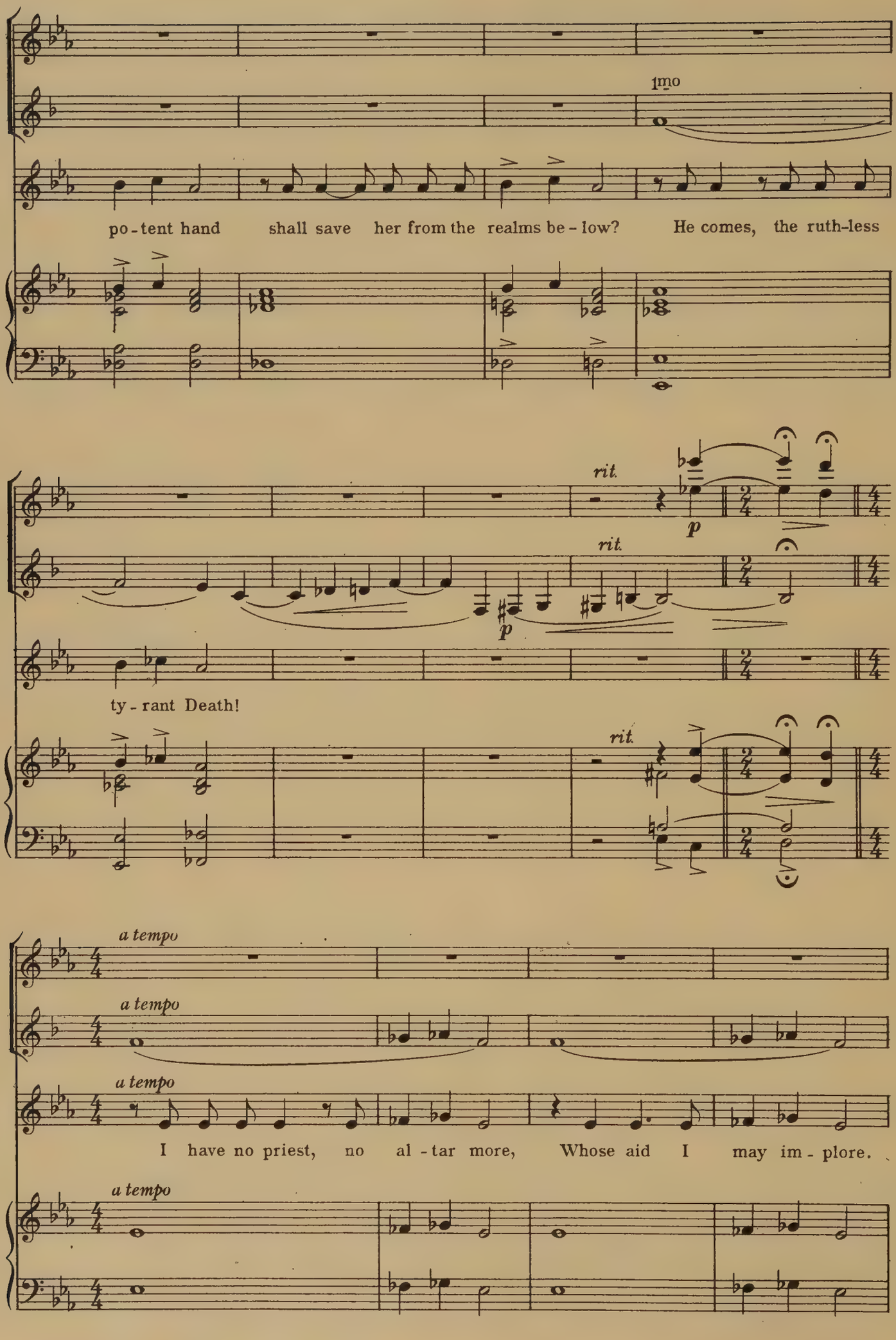

light of heav'n? Heard you a cry? Heard you a clash of
hands with - in? Or lam-en-ta-tions for the dead?
(very slowly)
1mo
1mo
Not e-ven a ser-vant holds his sta-tion here be - fore the gates. O 'midst this

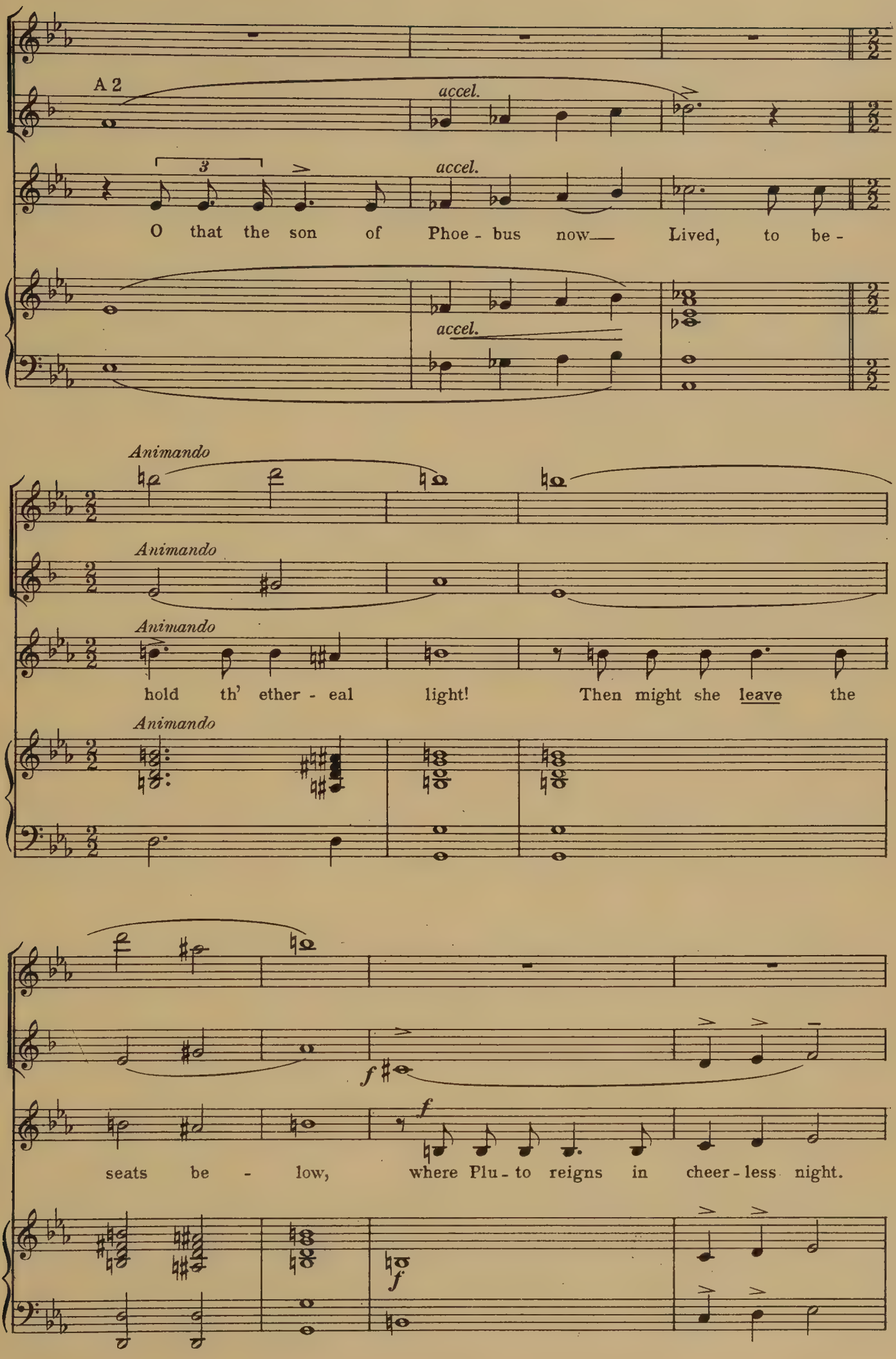

a 2
f
Pause
aw - ful gloom
Ap-pear, bright Pae - an, and dis - pel
the storm.
Pause
f
(very slowly)
pp
(very slowly)
If she be dead they would not thus be silent,
Nor could the
very slowly
pp
1mo
bod-y van-ish from the house.
No vase of foun-tain wa-ter do I see be-

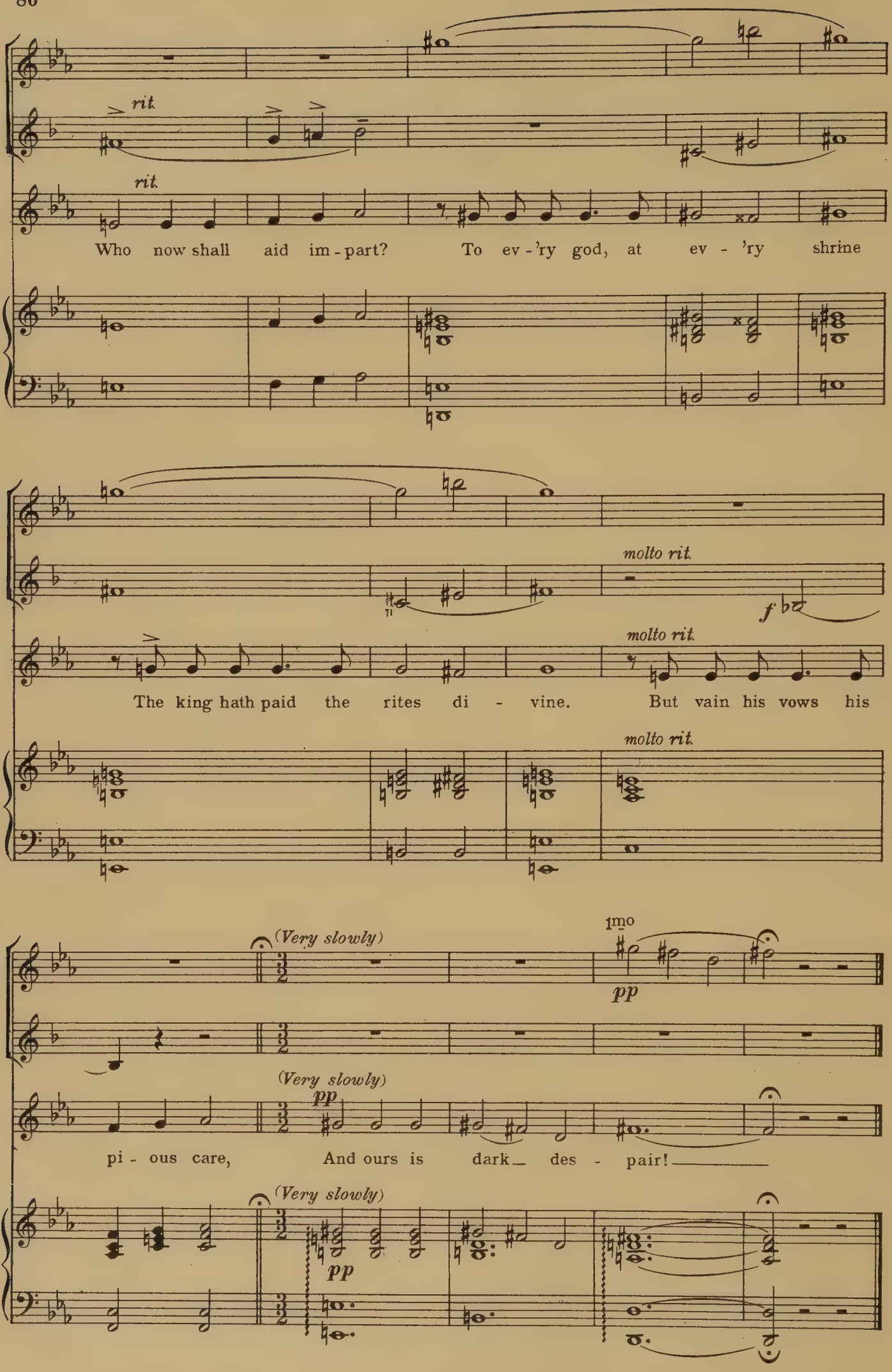

fore the doors, As cus - tom claims, to bathe the corse;
pp
pp
3
Nor does the young-er train of wom - en Raise their sor-row-ing voi-ces high.
A 2
mf
A 2
3
Yet this the fa - tal day when she must die. Why dost thou speak of this?
mf


1mo
(slowly, with feeling)
O thou hast touched my heart!
In vain! our pi - ous vows are vain!
slowly
(With more animation)
mf
(With more animation)
mf
Make we the fly - ing sail our care,
The light bark bound - ing
(With more animation)
mf
A 2
mf
o'er the main,
To what new realms shall we re - pair?


To Ly-cia's hall-ow'd strand, Or where, 'mid so-li-ta-ry state,
'Mid thirs-ty des-erts wild and wide, That close him in on ev-'ry side, Pro-phe-tic
Am-mon holds his aw-ful seat? What charm, what
(with espression)


1mo
po - tent hand shall save her from the realms be - low? He comes, the ruth-less
rit.
p
rit.
p
ty - rant Death!
rit.
a tempo
a tempo
a tempo
I have no priest, no al - tar more, Whose aid I may im - plore.
a tempo


A 2
accel.
accel.
accel.
O that the son of Phoe - bus now— Lived, to be -
Animando
Animando
Animando
Animando
hold th' ether - eal light! Then might she leave the
f
f
seats be - low, where Plu - to reigns in cheer - less night.
f


rit.
rit.
Who now shall aid im - part? To ev - 'ry god, at ev - 'ry shrine
molto rit.
f
molto rit.
The king hath paid the rites di - vine. But vain his vows his
molto rit.
(Very slowly)
1mo
pp
(Very slowly)
pp
pi - ous care, And ours is dark des - pair!
(Very slowly)
pp

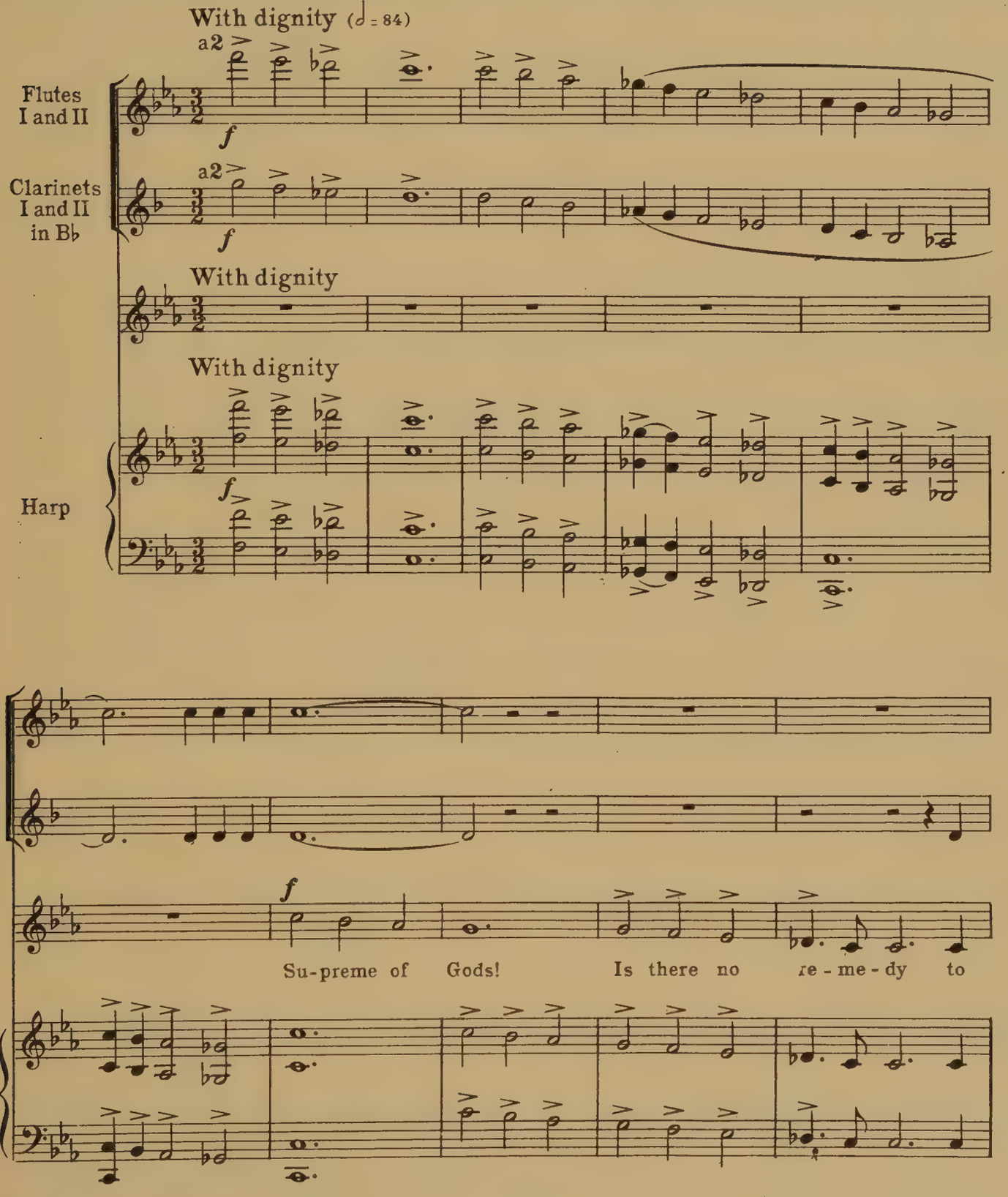
No 2. Chorus

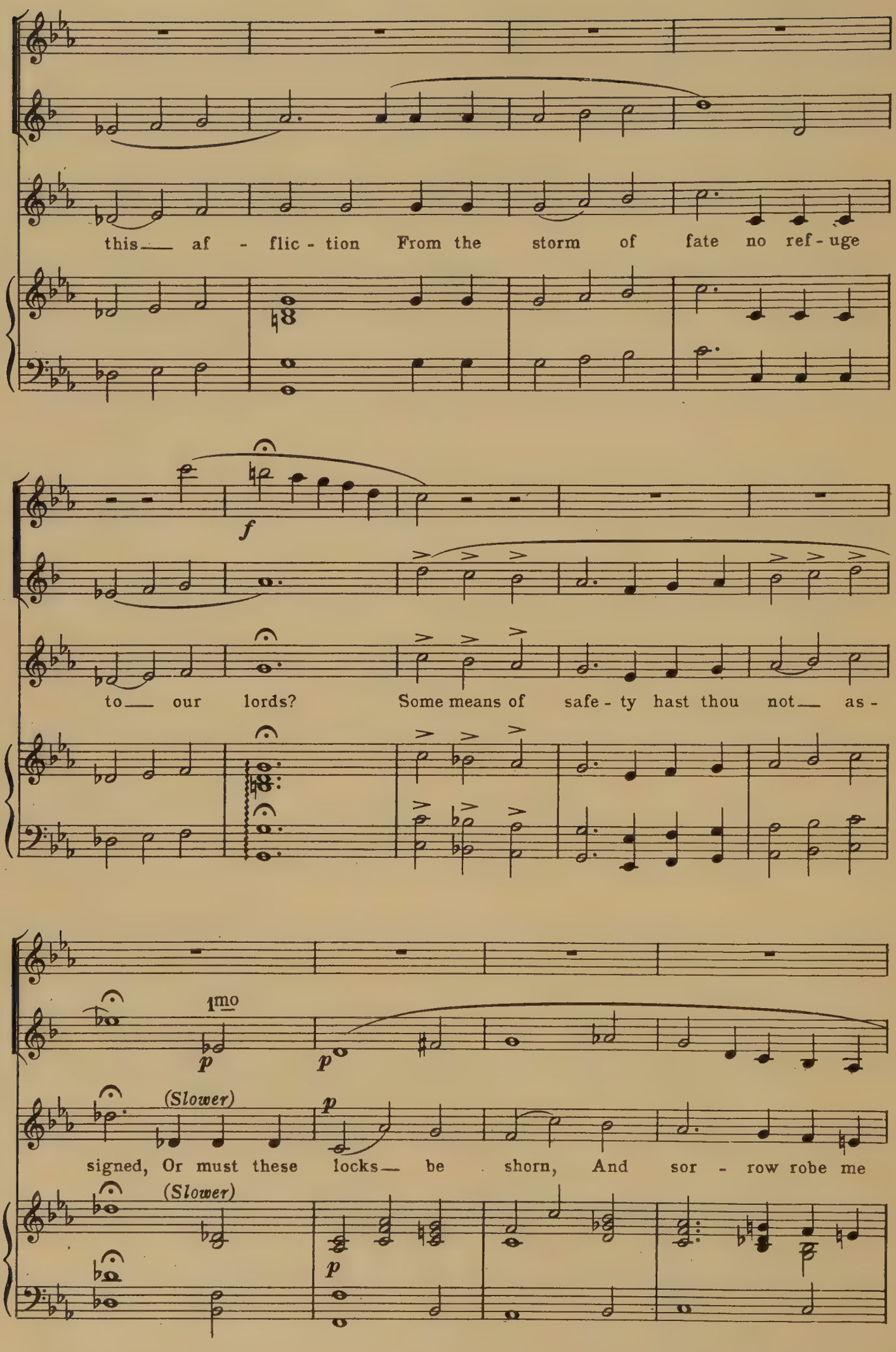
SUPREME OF GODS

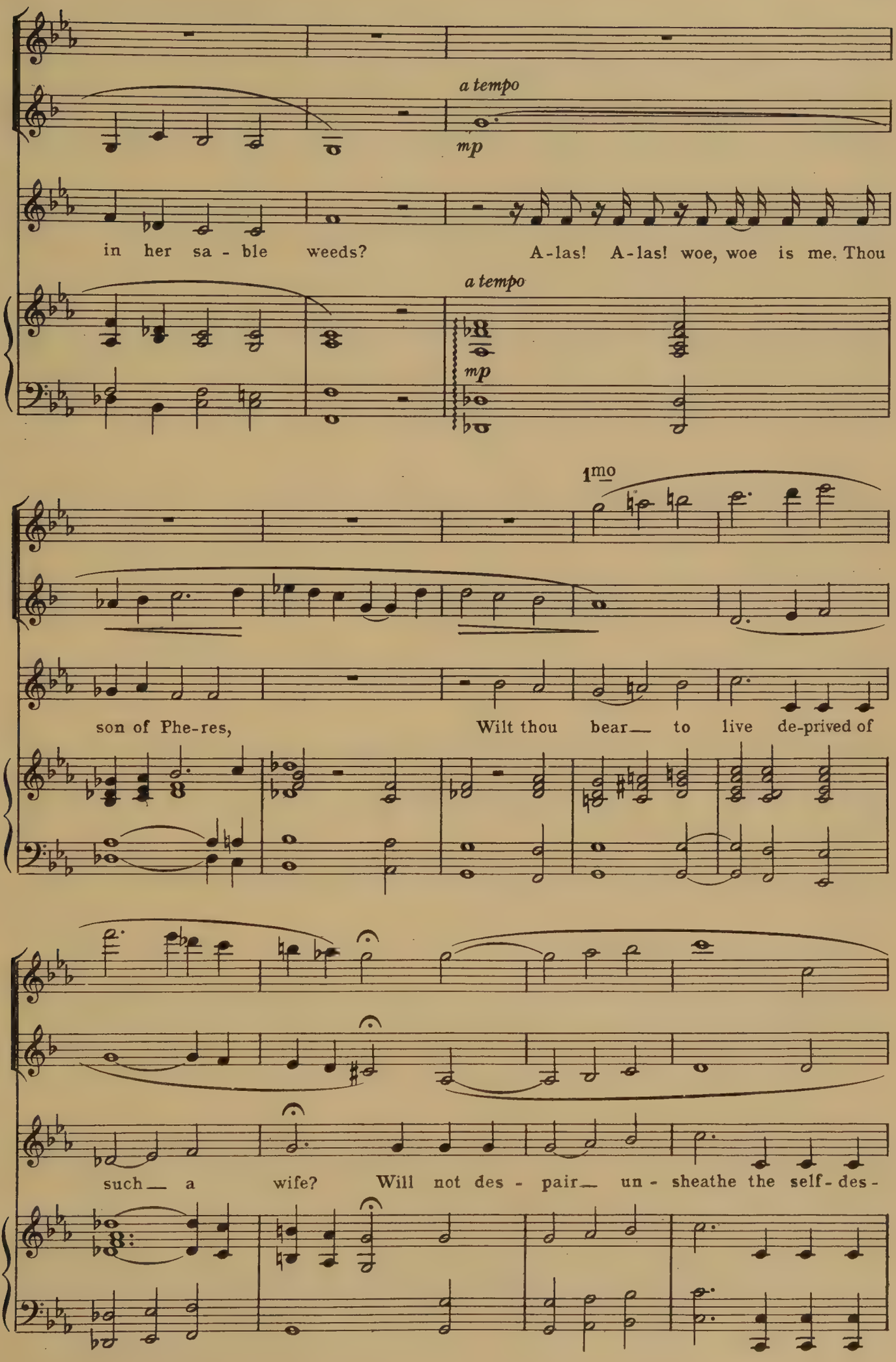
CHORUS LEADER:– "Doth not Admetus groan for this affliction,
Of such a noble wife to be bereft?"

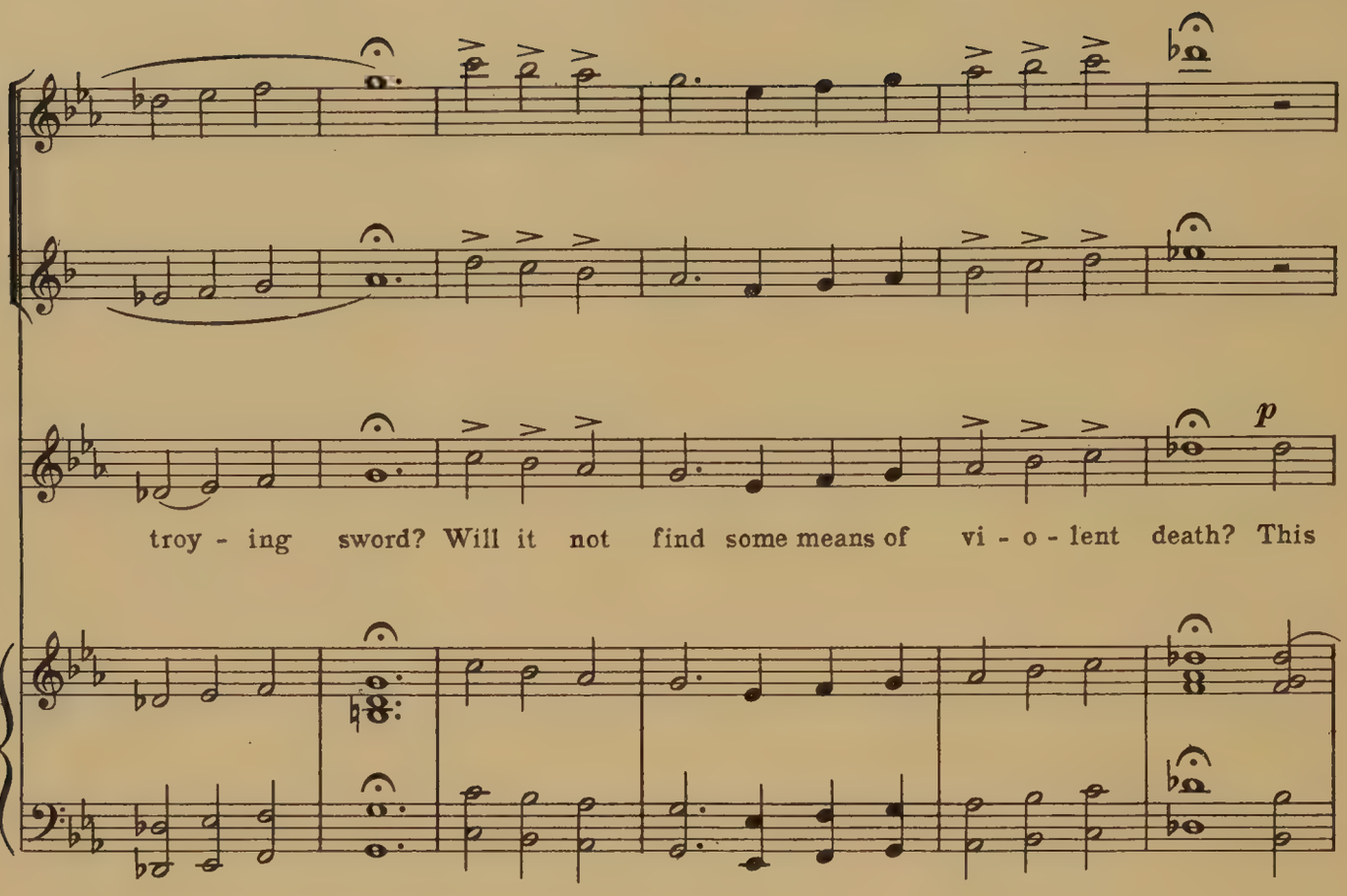
HANDMAID:– "But I will go and make your presence known" *(Exit)*

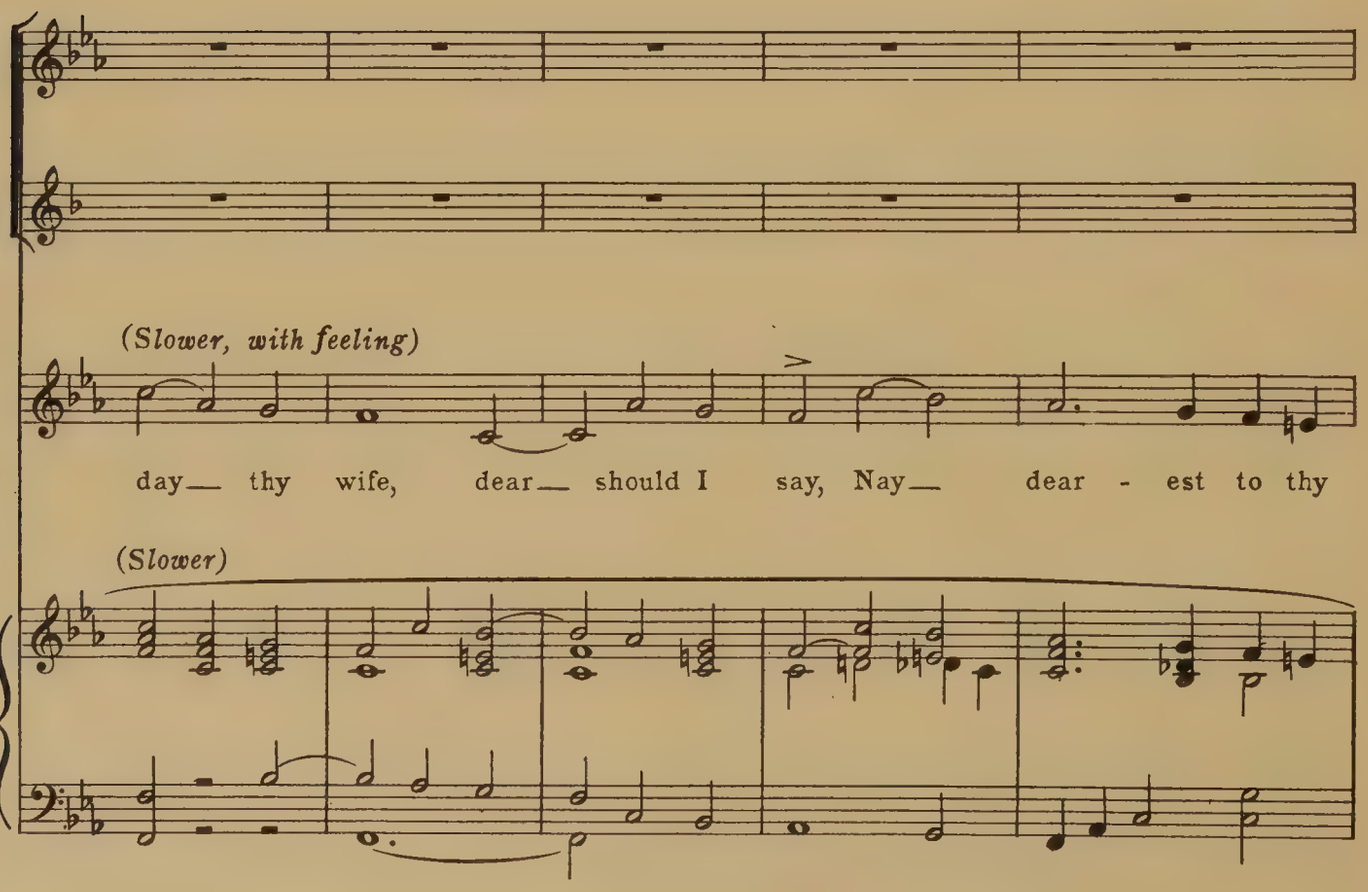
(All rise and pass into the circle and kneel, facing inwards. During the introductory measures for instruments the members of the Chorus move to the altar and kneel at the first word.)

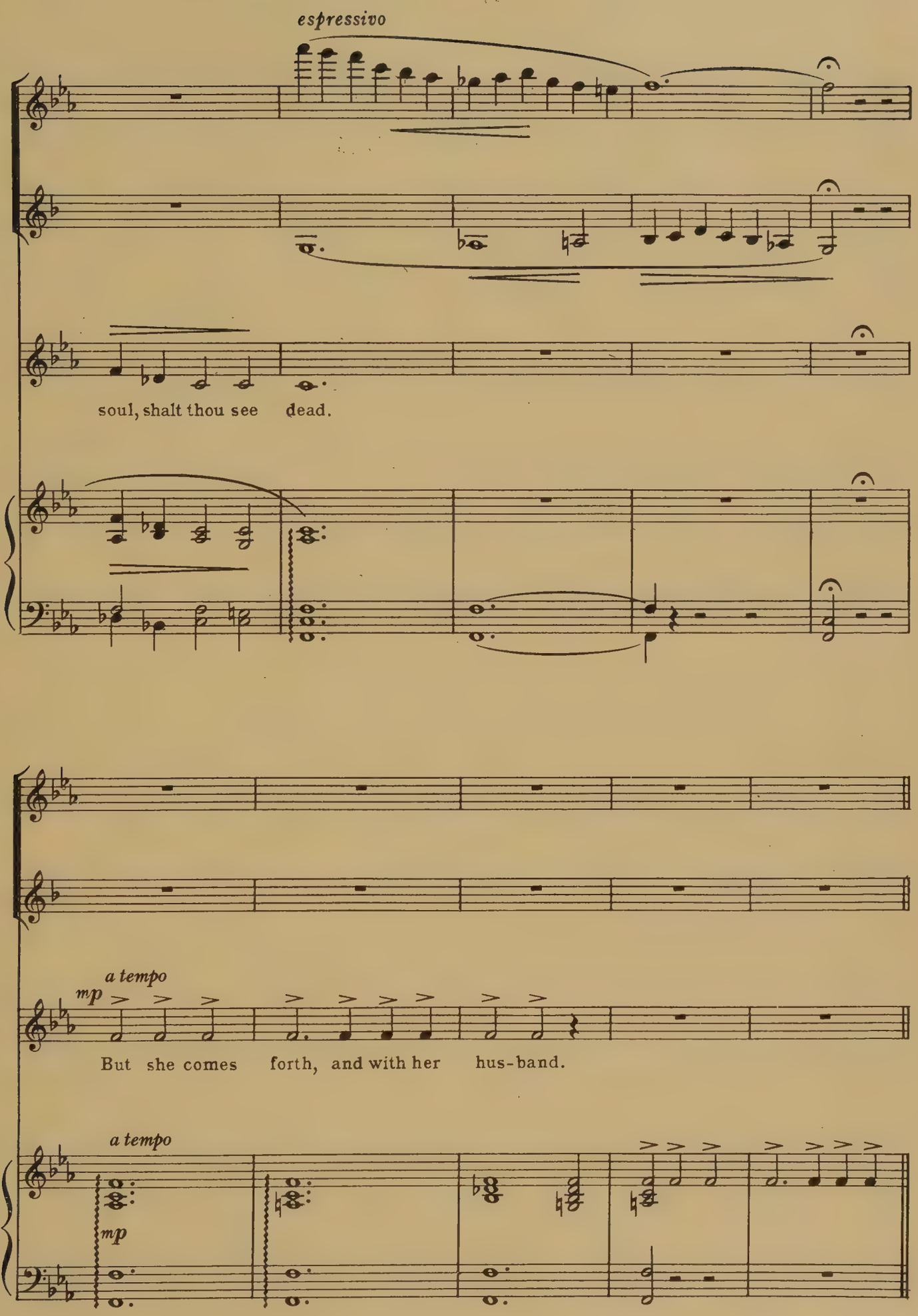



this af - flic - tion From the storm of fate no ref - uge
f
to our lords? Some means of safe - ty hast thou not as -
1mo
p
p
(Slower)
p
signed, Or must these locks be shorn, And sor - row robe me
(Slower)
p


a tempo
mp
in her sa - ble weeds? A-las! A-las! woe, woe is me. Thou
a tempo
mp
1mo
son of Phe-res, Wilt thou bear to live de-prived of
such a wife? Will not des - pair un - sheathe the self-des-

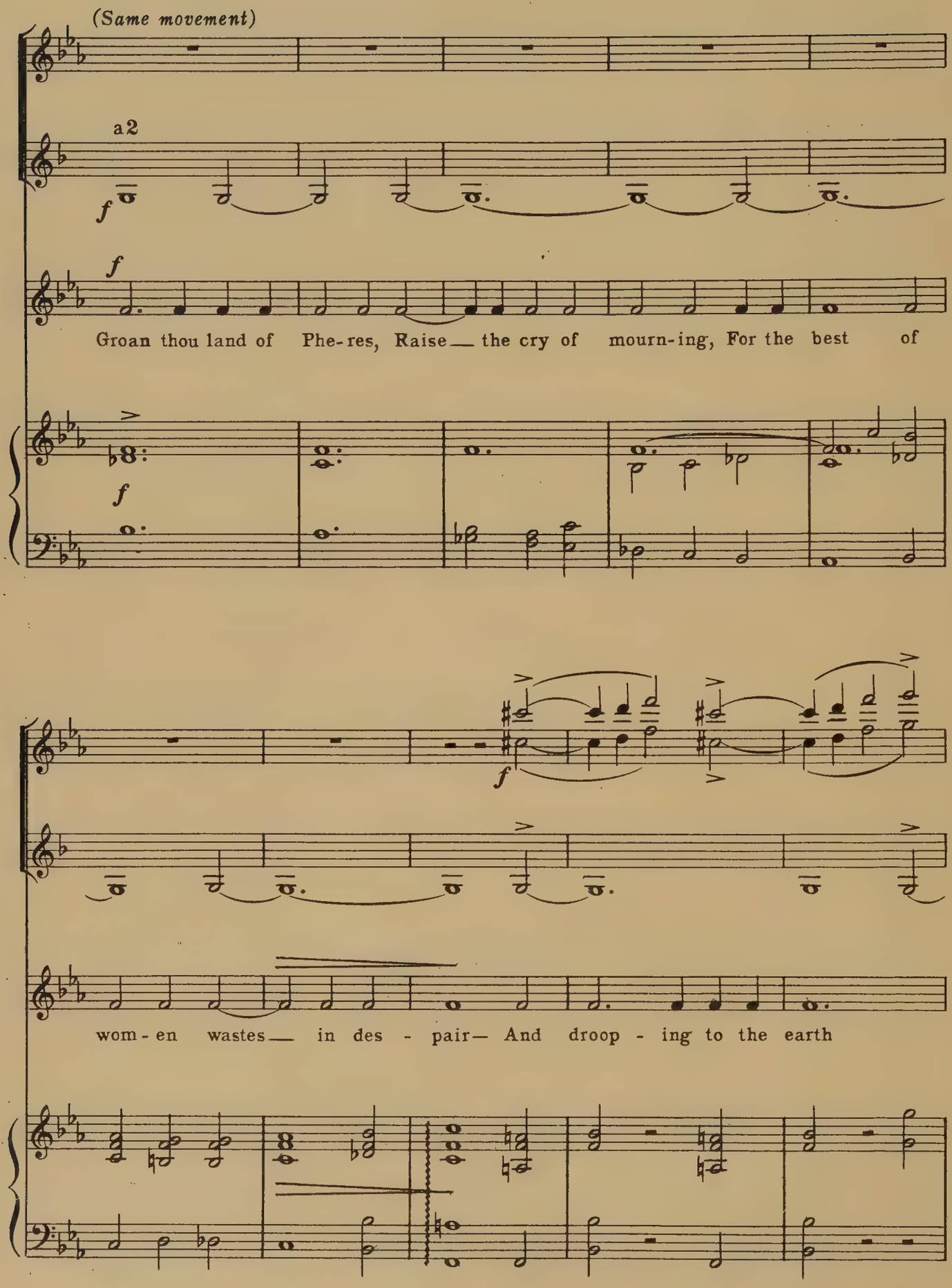

p
troy - ing sword? Will it not find some means of vi - o - lent death? This

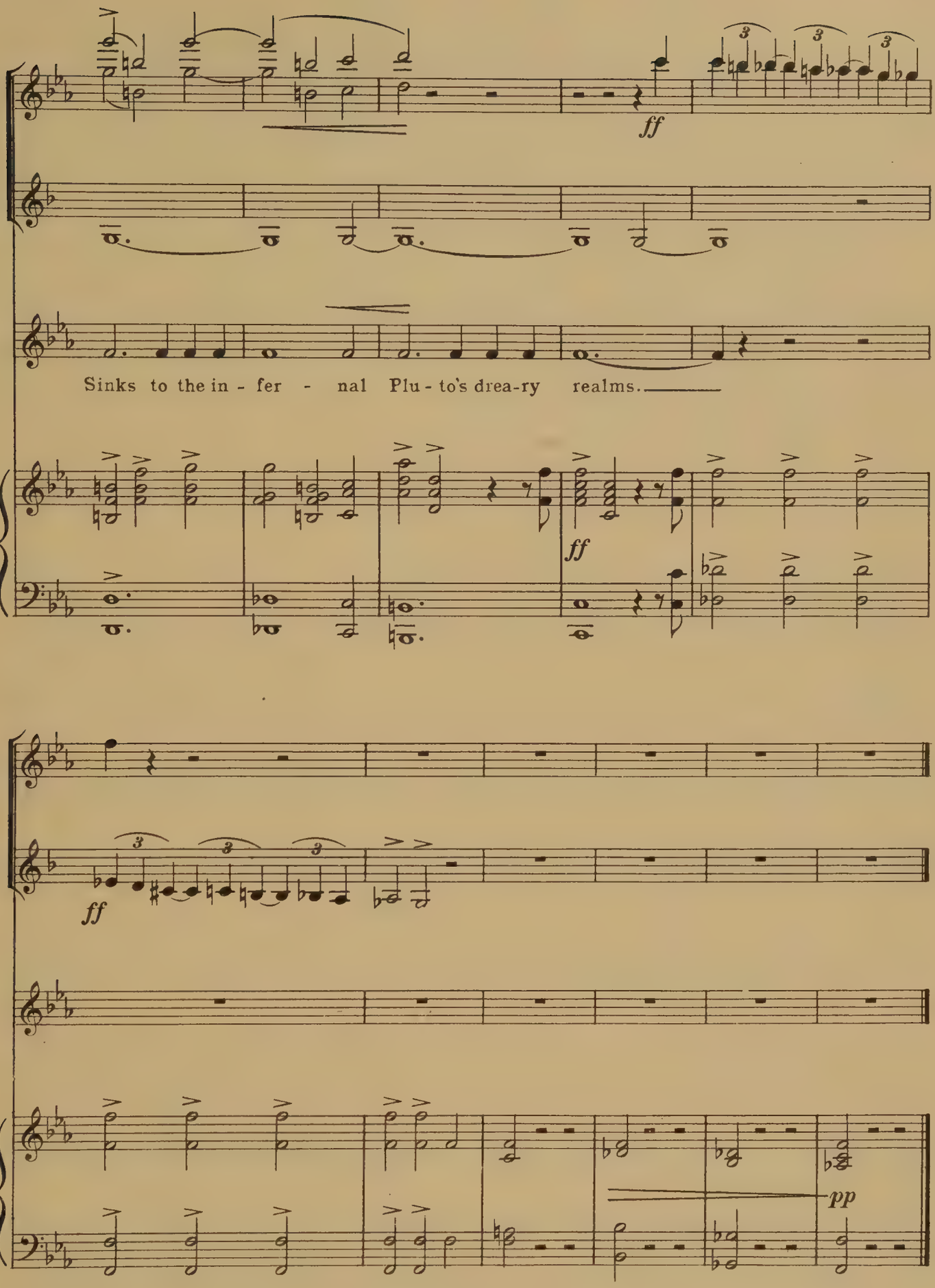

(Slower, with feeling)
day— thy wife, dear— should I say, Nay— dear - est to thy
(Slower)


espressivo
soul, shalt thou see dead.
a tempo
mp
But she comes forth, and with her hus-band.
a tempo
mp

No 3. Chorus

GROAN THOU LAND OF PHERES

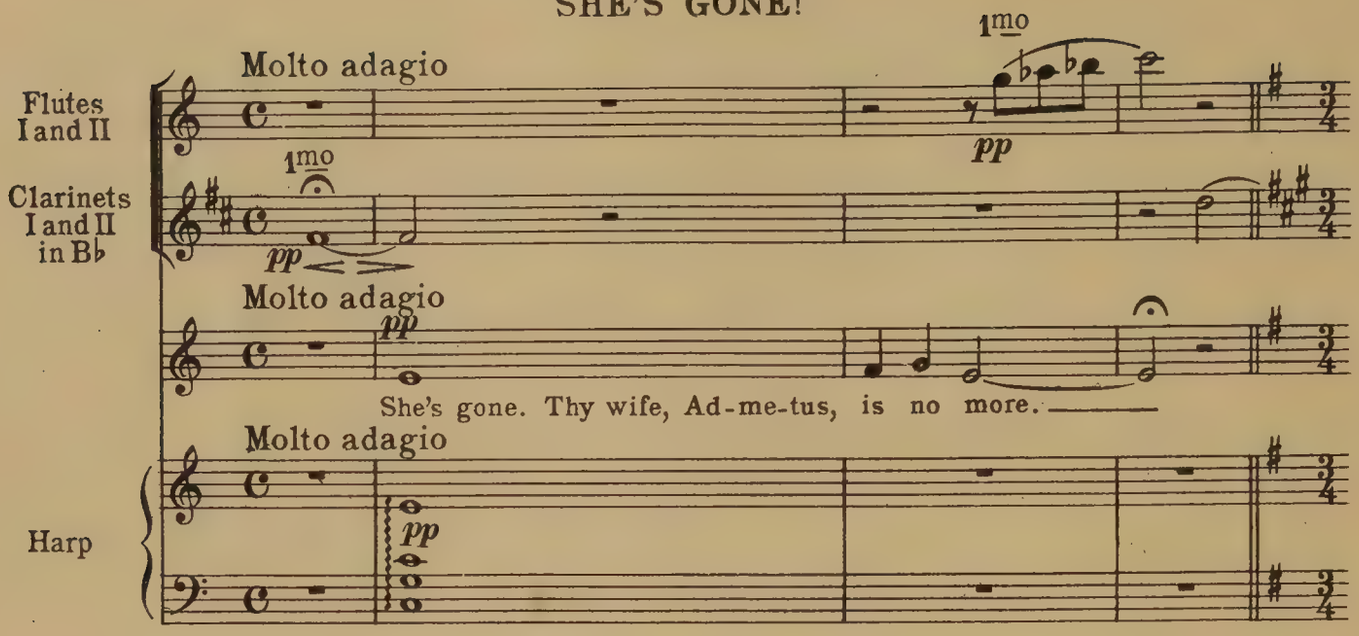




ALCESTIS:— "I am no more"
ADMETUS:— "How dost thou? Wilt thou leave us then?"
ALCESTIS:— "Farewell!"
ADMETUS:— "O wretch undone!"

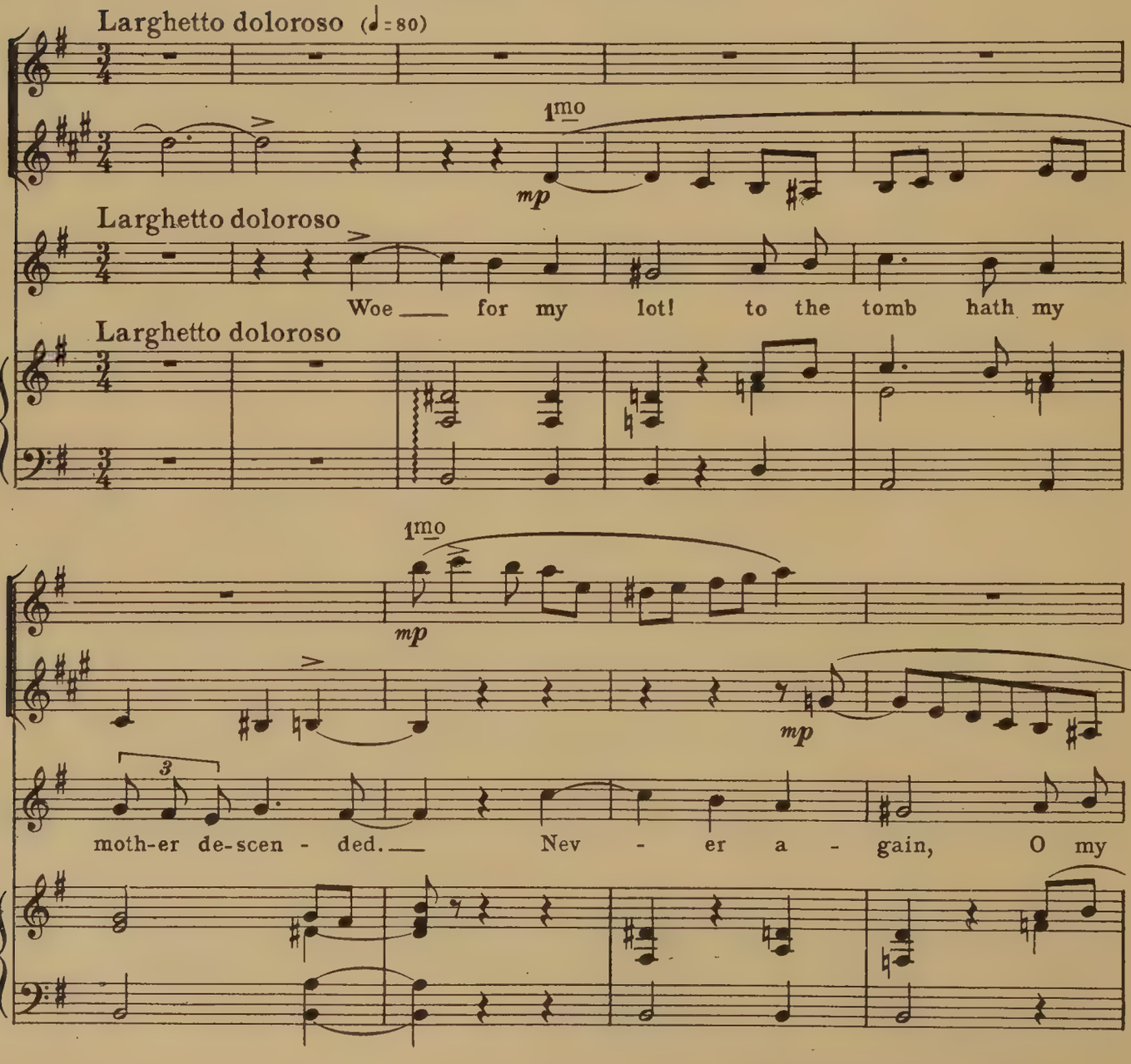
No 4a Chorus

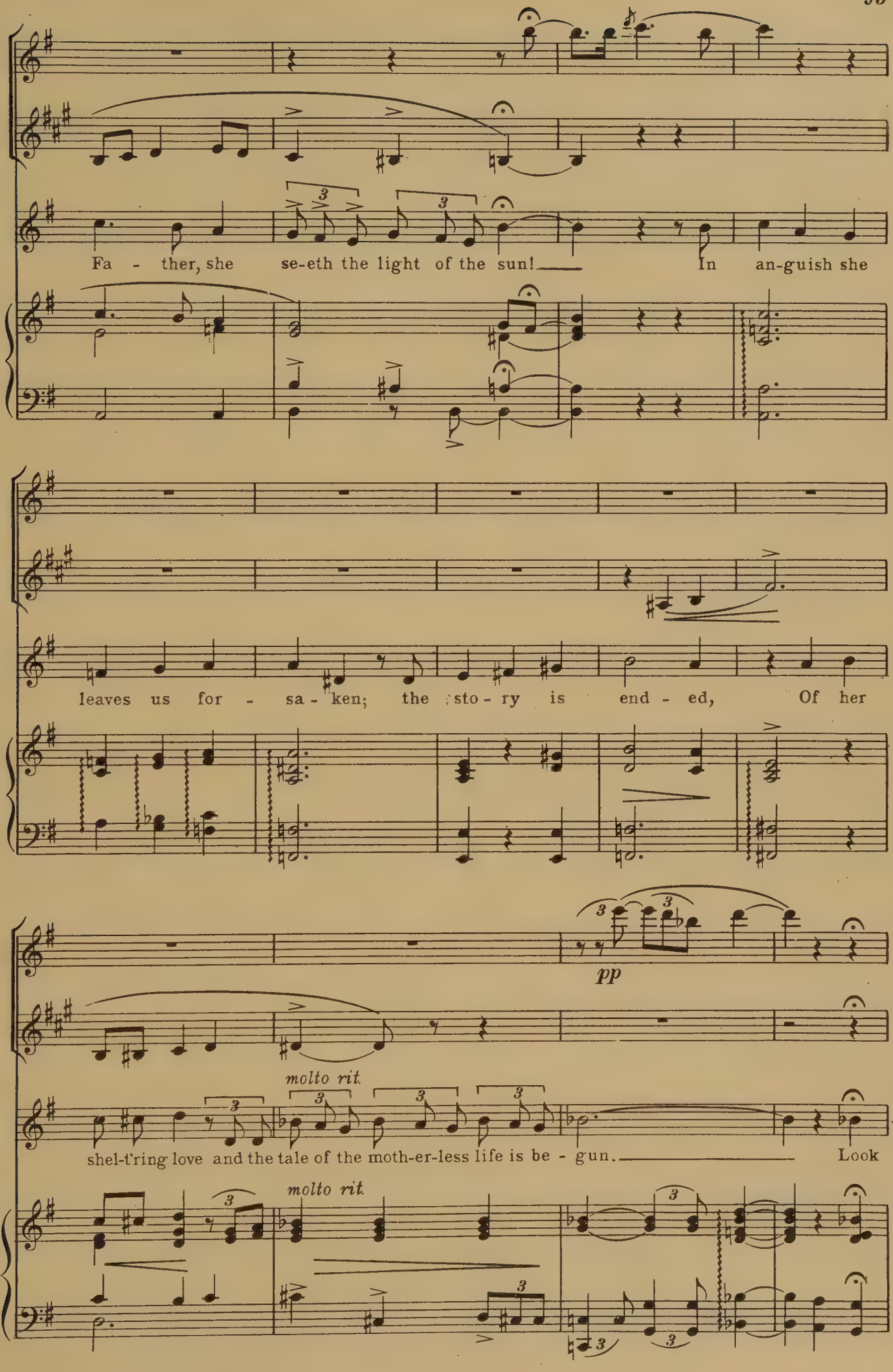
SHE'S GONE!

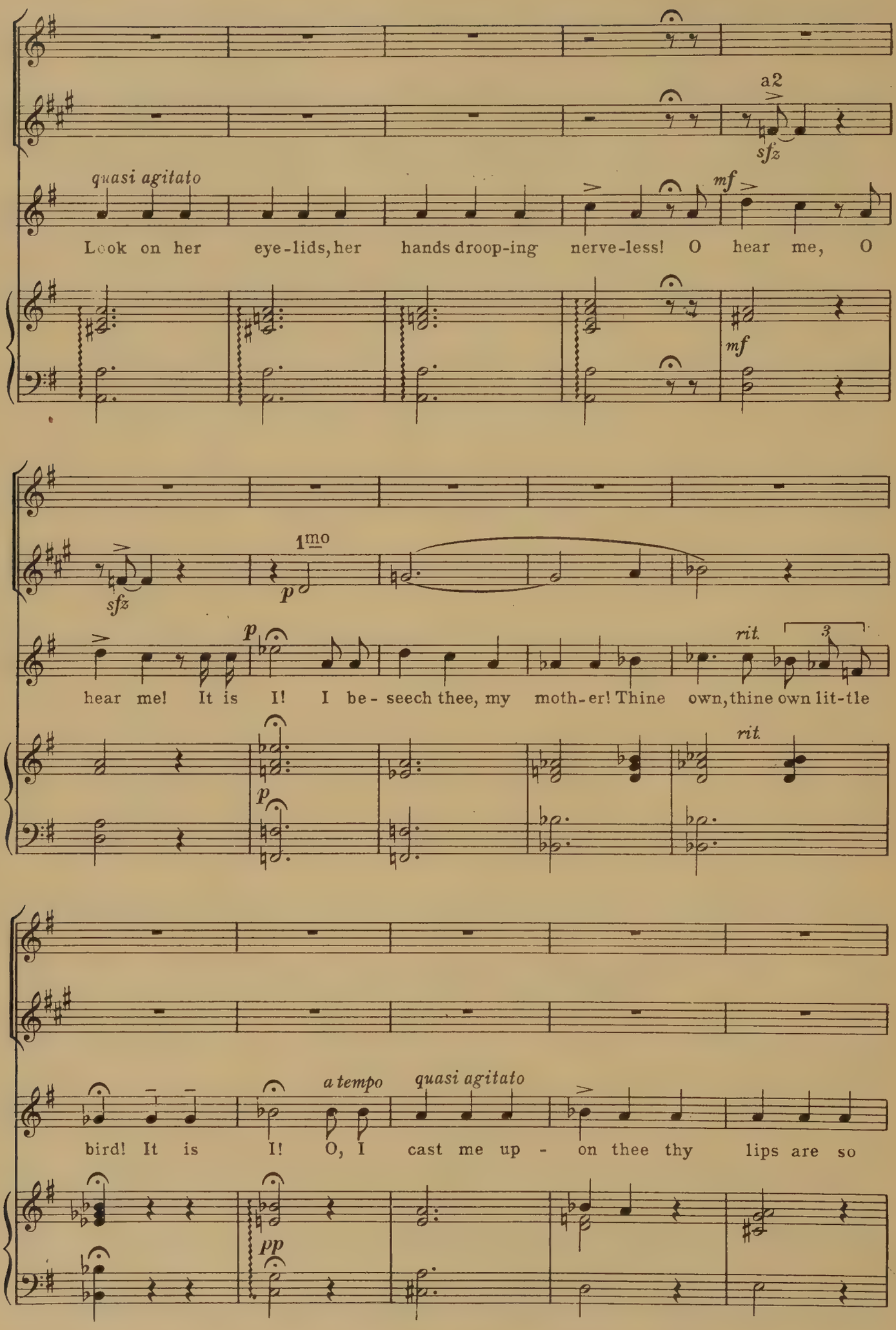


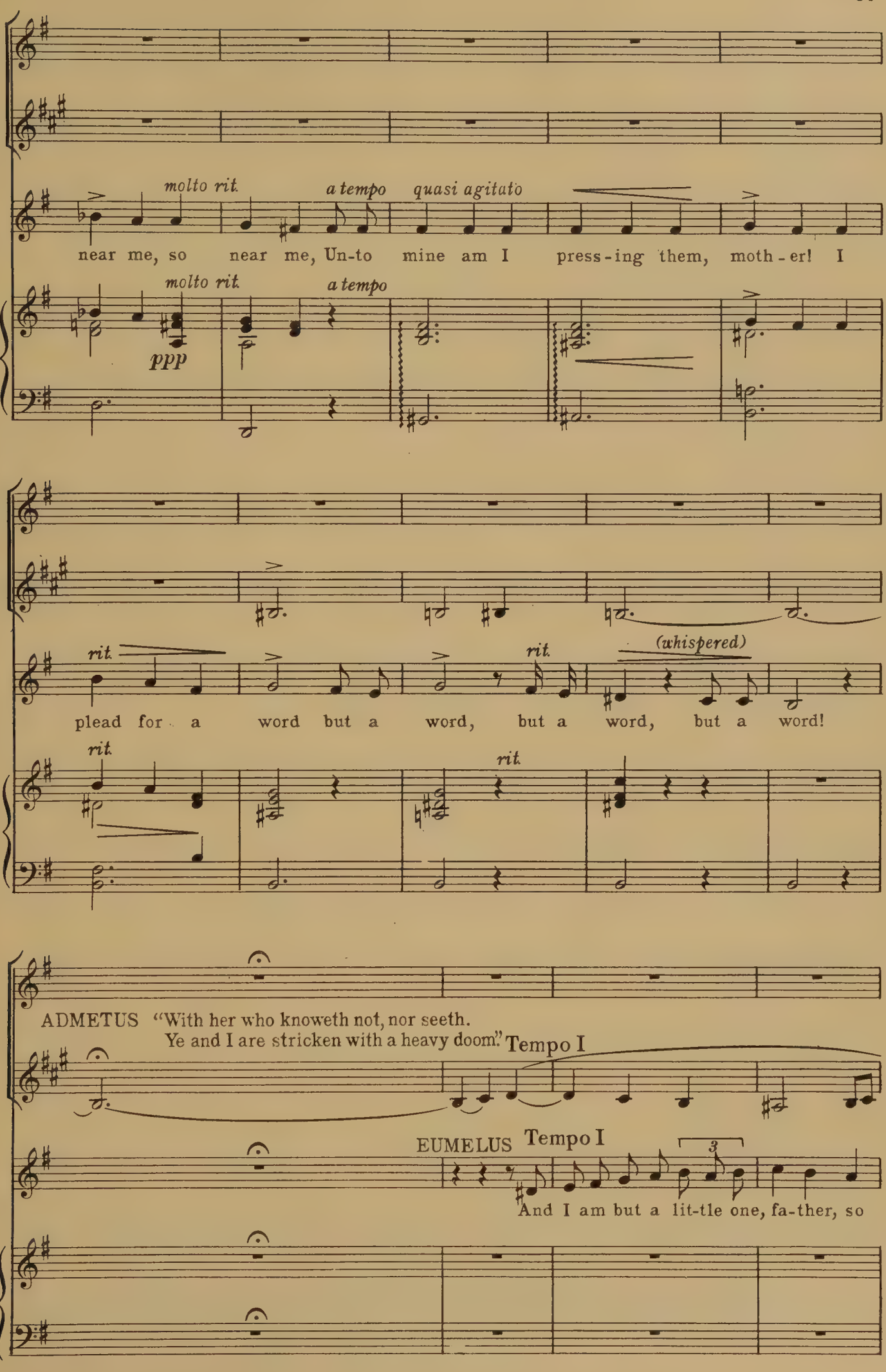
No 4b

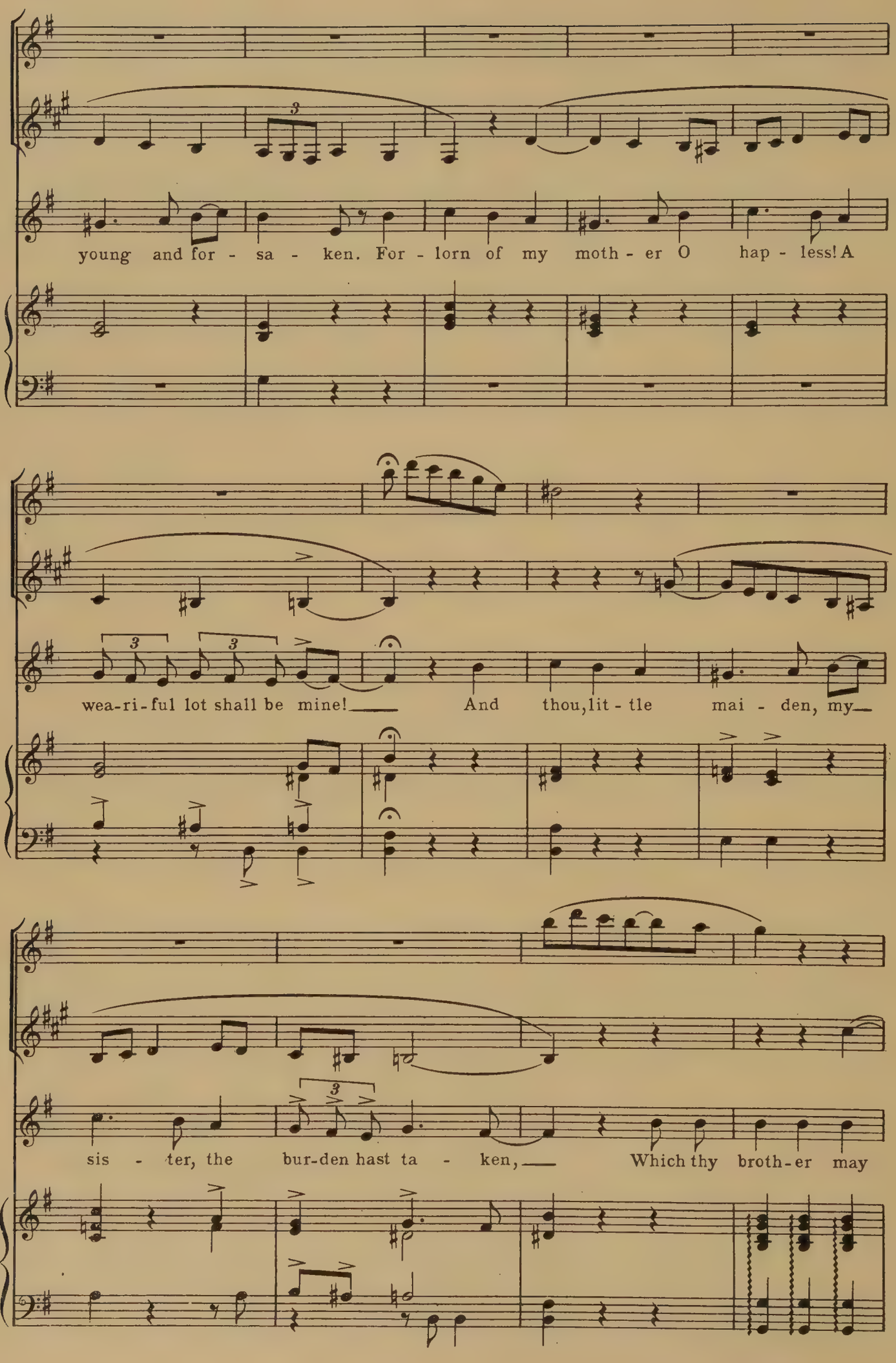
LAMENT OF EUMELUS

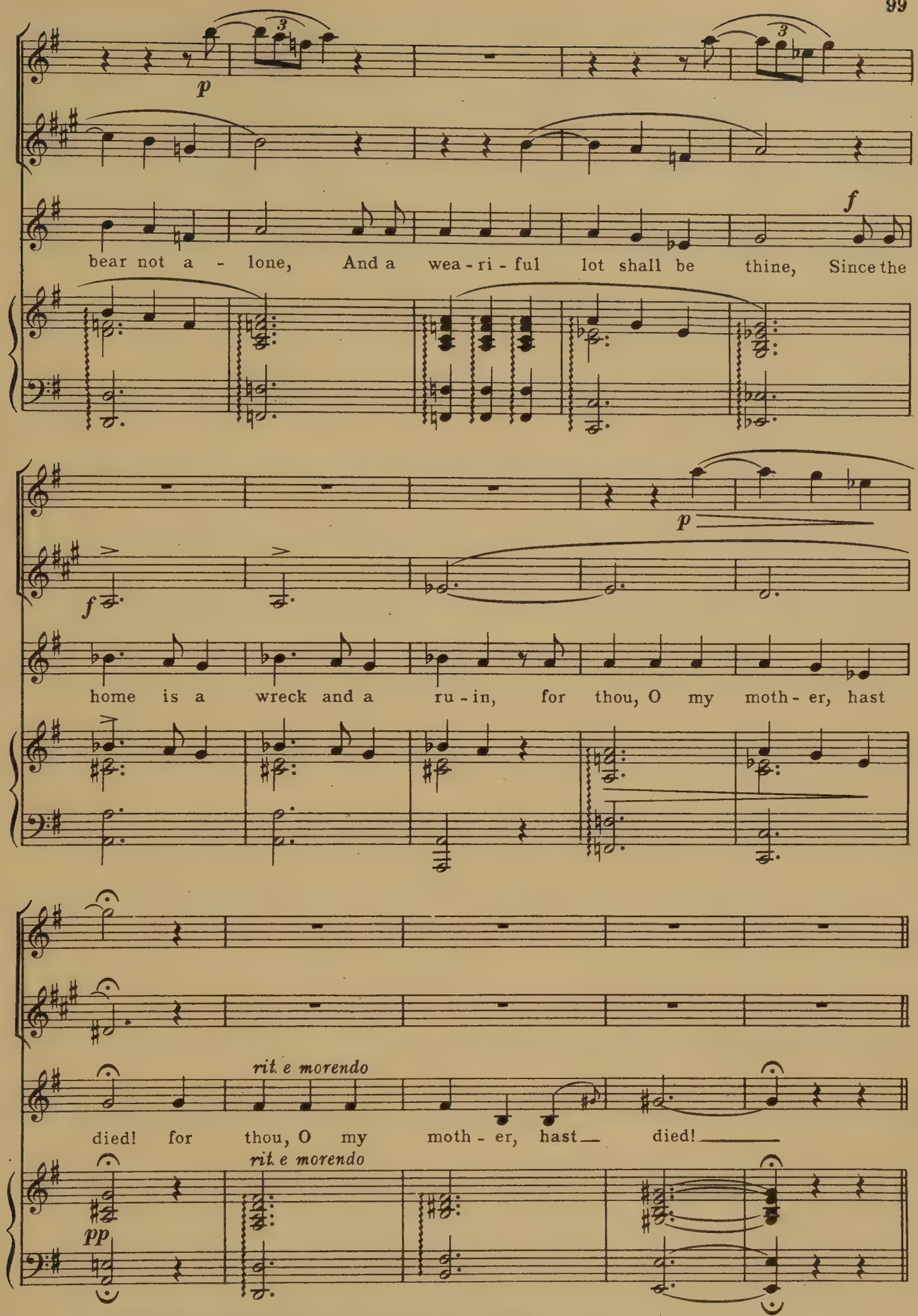



Fa - ther, she se-eth the light of the sun! In an-guish she
leaves us for - sa - ken; the sto - ry is end - ed, Of her
pp
molto rit.
shel-t'ring love and the tale of the moth-er-less life is be - gun. Look
molto rit.


a2
sfz
quasi agitato
mf
Look on her eye-lids, her hands droop-ing nerve-less! O hear me, O
mf
sfz
1mo
p
p
rit.
3
hear me! It is I! I be- seech thee, my moth-er! Thine own, thine own lit-tle
p
rit.
a tempo
quasi agitato
bird! It is I! O, I cast me up - on thee thy lips are so
pp


molto rit.
a tempo
quasi agitato
near me, so near me, Un-to mine am I press-ing them, moth-er! I
molto rit.
a tempo
ppp
rit.
rit.
(whispered)
plead for a word but a word, but a word, but a word!
rit.
rit.
ADMETUS "With her who knoweth not, nor seeth.
Ye and I are stricken with a heavy doom."
Tempo I
EUMELUS
Tempo I
3
And I am but a lit-tle one, fa-ther, so

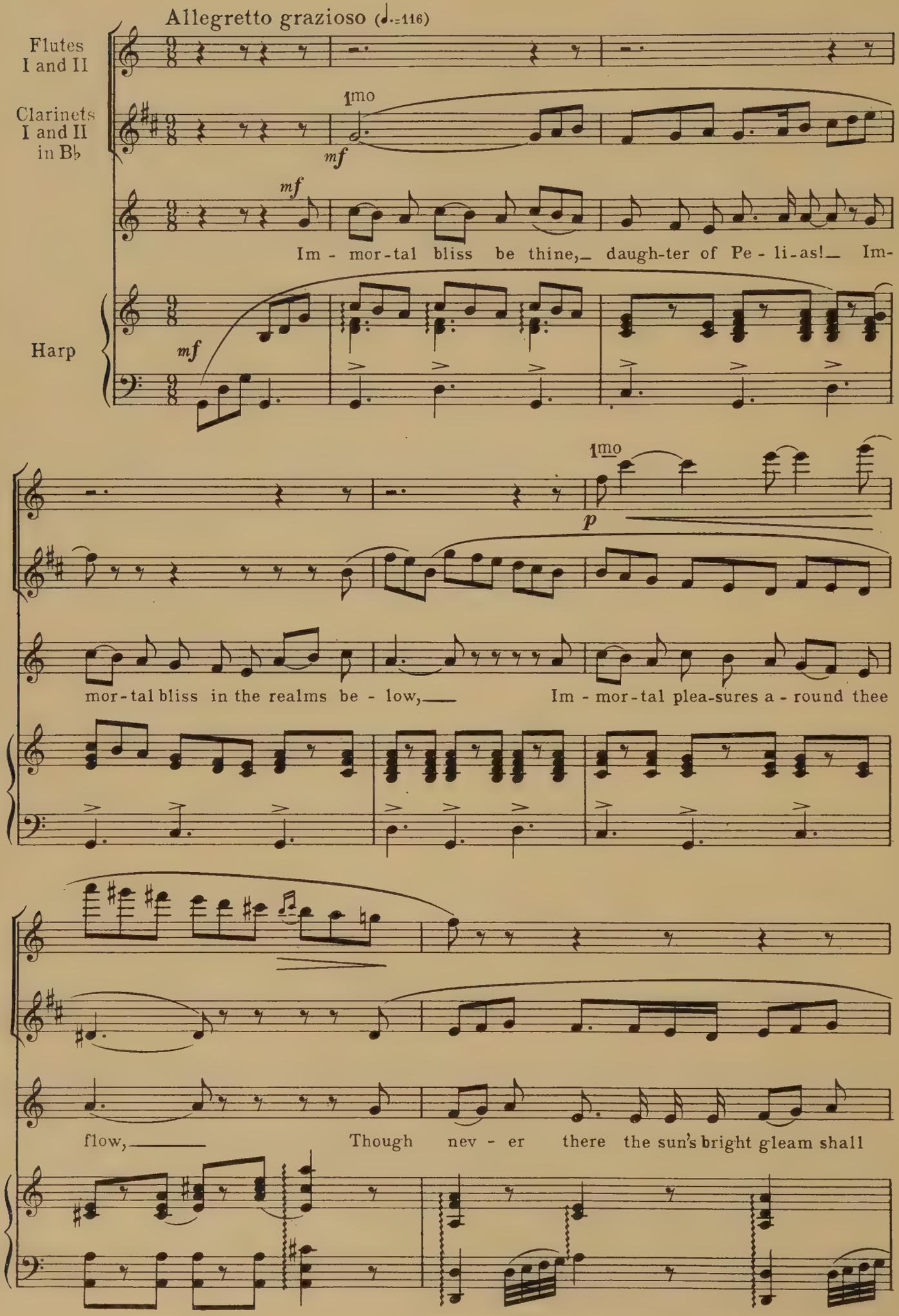

young and for - sa - ken. For - lorn of my moth - er O hap - less! A
wea-ri-ful lot shall be mine! And thou, lit - tle mai - den, my
sis - ter, the bur-den hast ta - ken, Which thy broth-er may

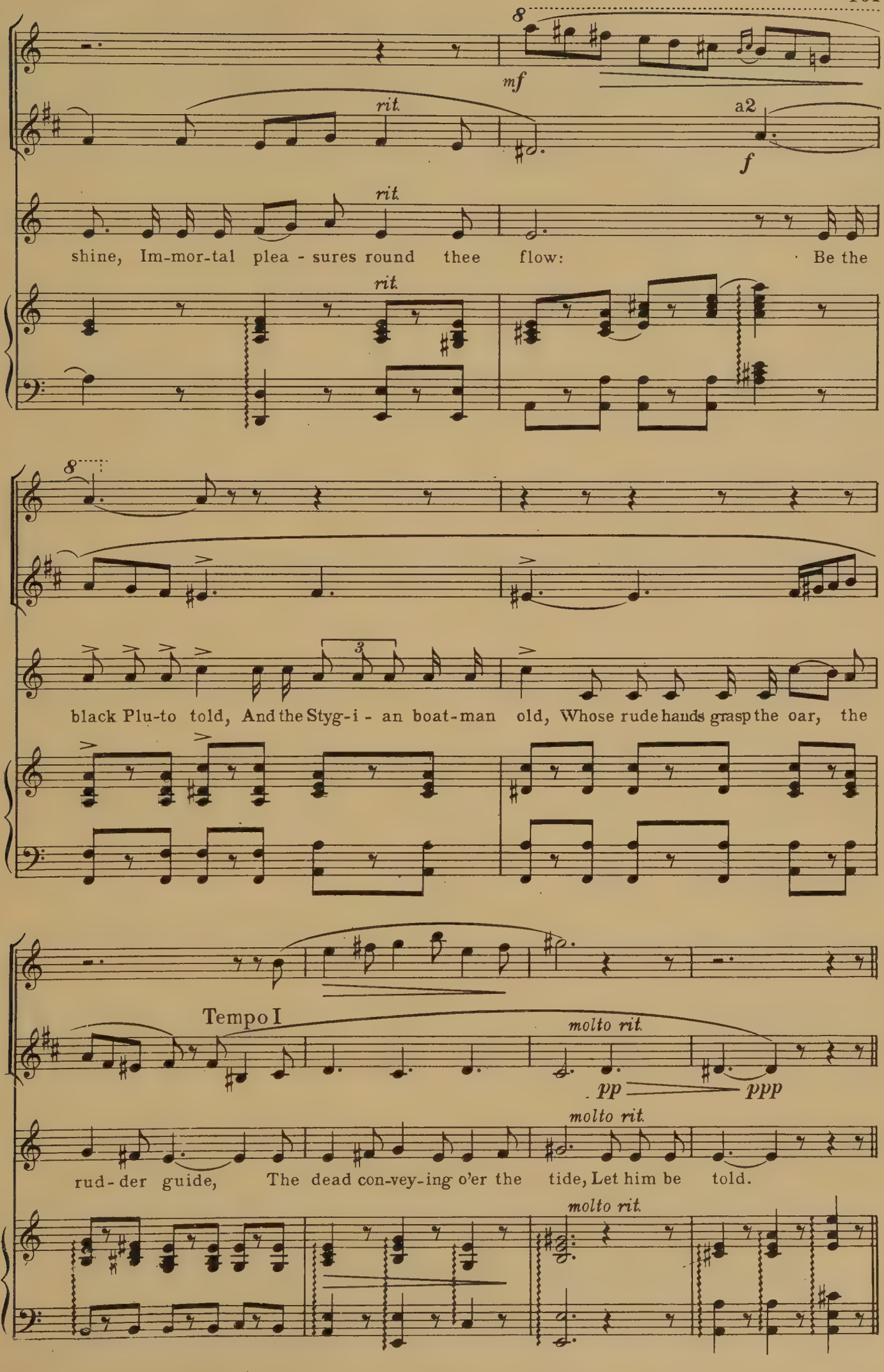


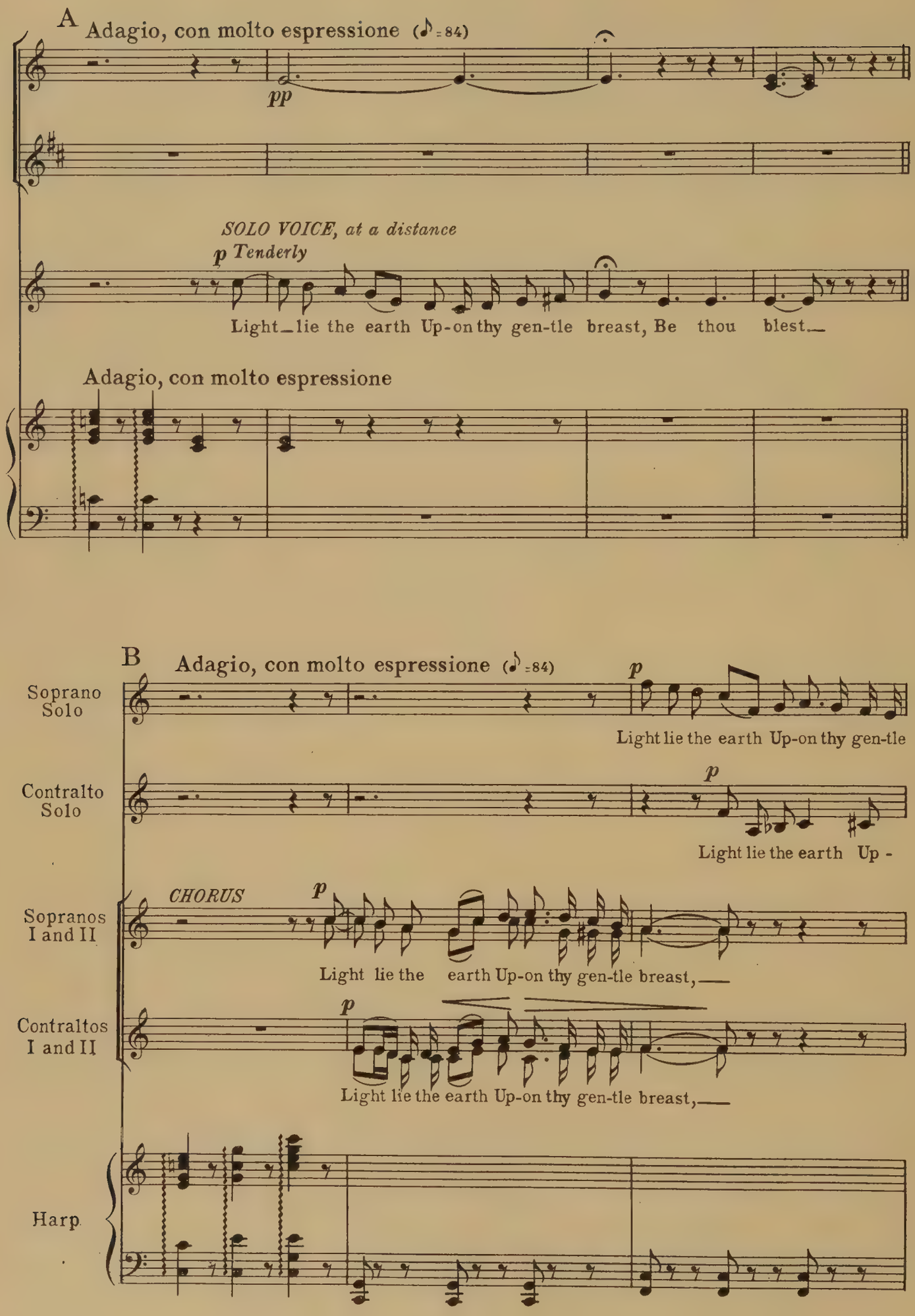
ADMETUS—"Music of flutes the city through, or lyres,
Be none, while twelve moons round their circles out;
For dearer dead, nor kinder unto me,
I shall not bury; worthy of mine honor
Is she, for she alone has died for me."

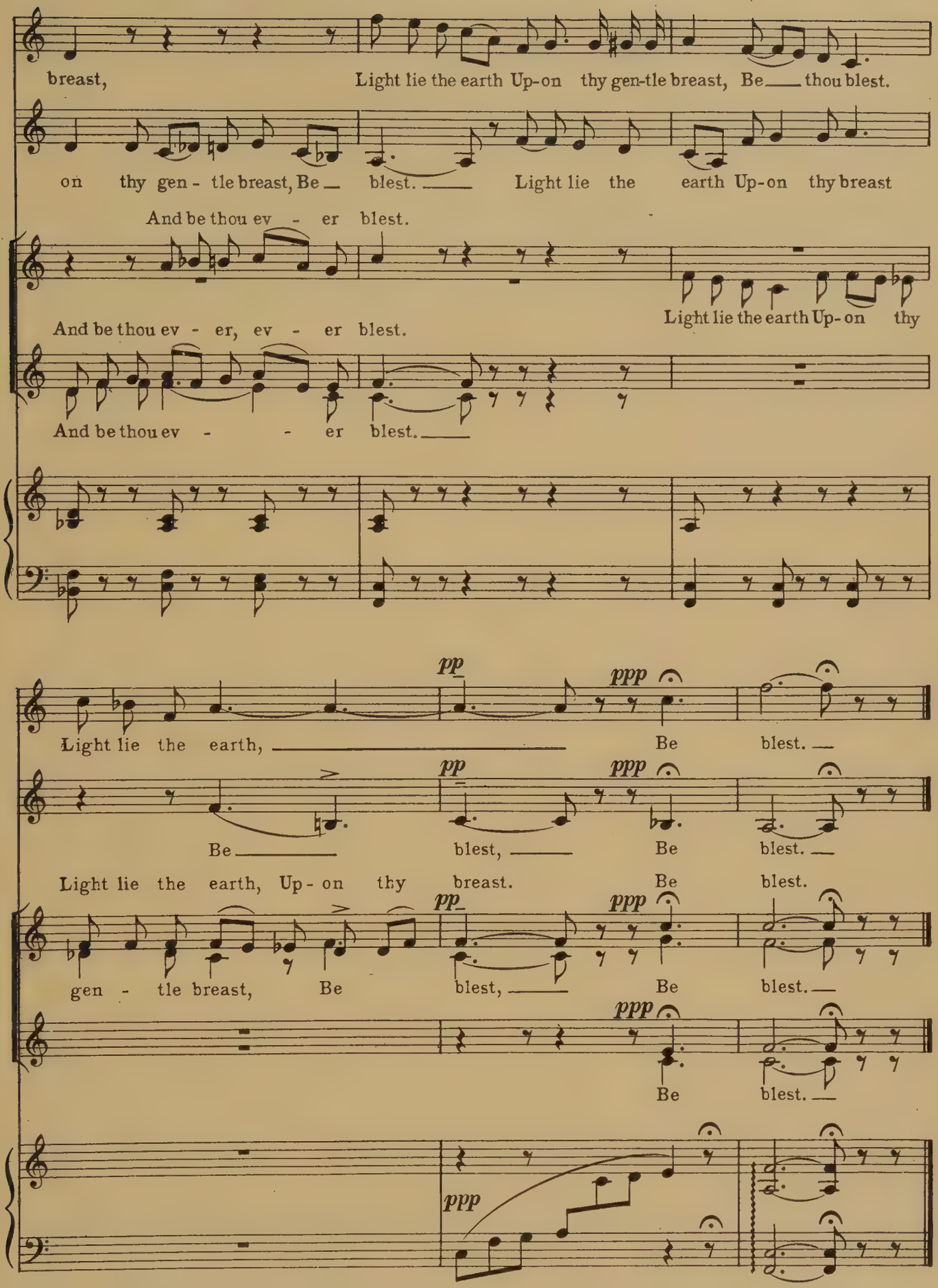
Nº 5 Chorus

IMMORTAL BLISS BE THINE




8
mf
rit.
a2
f
rit.
shine, Im-mor-tal plea - sures round thee flow: Be the
rit.
8
black Plu-to told, And the Styg-i - an boat-man old, Whose rude hands grasp the oar, the
Tempo I
molto rit.
pp
ppp
molto rit.
rud-der guide, The dead con-vey-ing o'er the tide, Let him be told.
molto rit.

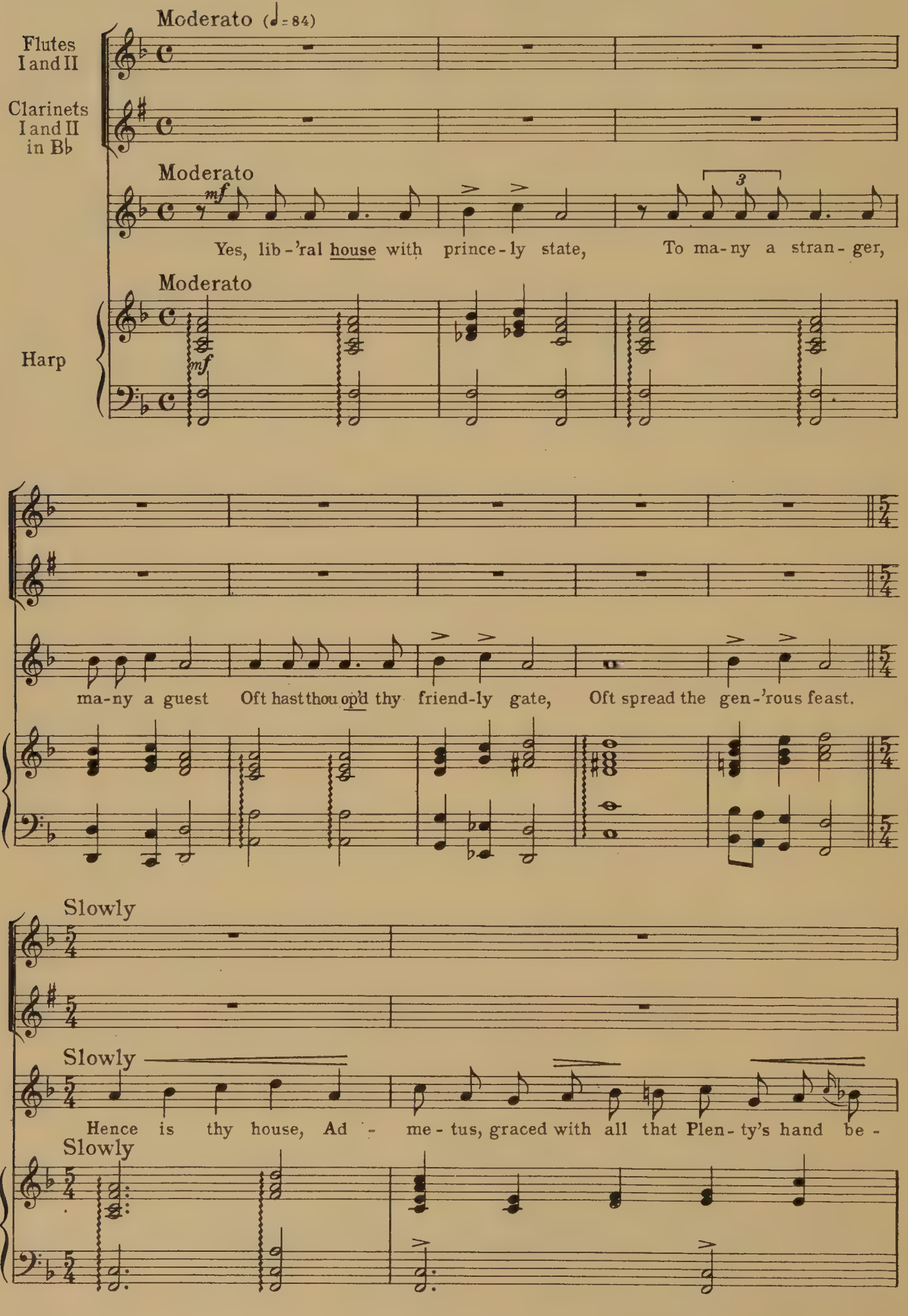

A
Adagio, con molto espressione (♪=84)
pp
SOLO VOICE, at a distance
p Tenderly
Light lie the earth Up-on thy gen-tle breast, Be thou blest
Adagio, con molto espressione
B
Adagio, con molto espressione (♪=84)
Soprano Solo
p
Light lie the earth Up-on thy gen-tle
Contralto Solo
p
Light lie the earth Up -
CHORUS
Sopranos I and II
p
Light lie the earth Up-on thy gen-tle breast,
Contraltos I and II
p
Light lie the earth Up-on thy gen-tle breast,
Harp

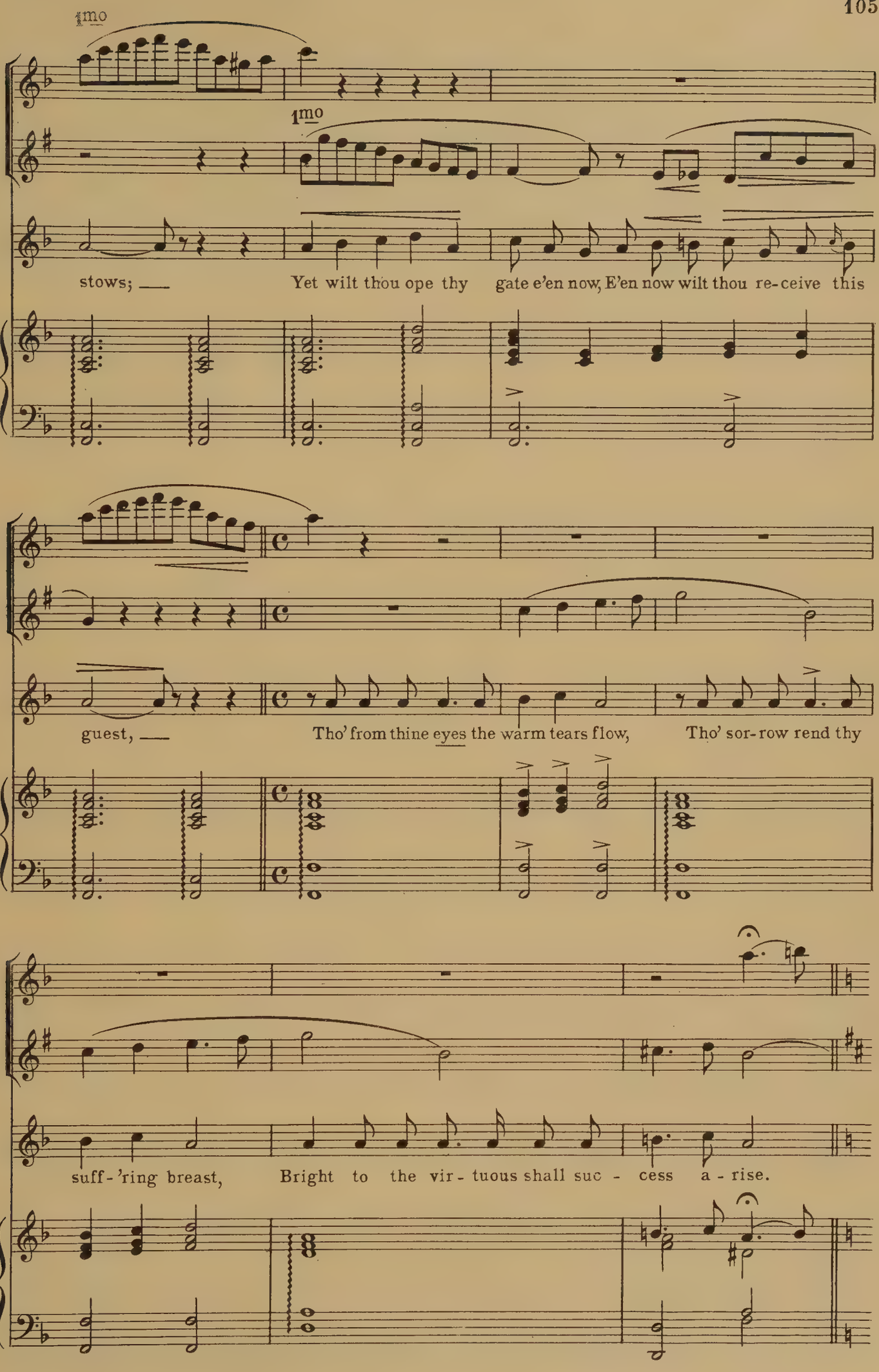


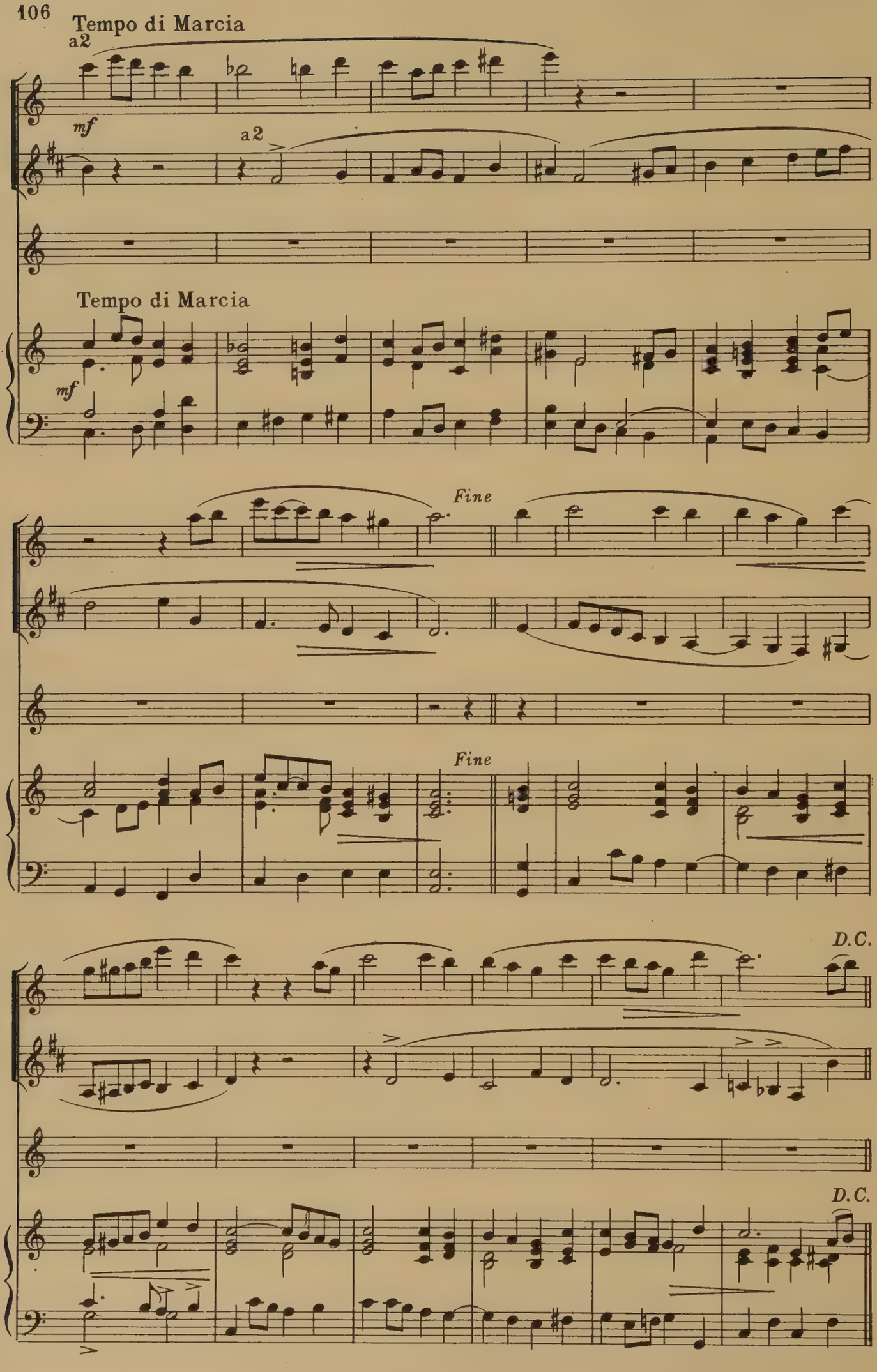
ADMETUS:— "Never had he been won
to pass my doors,
Had he one whit of my
afflictions known.
Those halls of mine as yet
have never learnt
To thrust away nor to
dishonor guests."

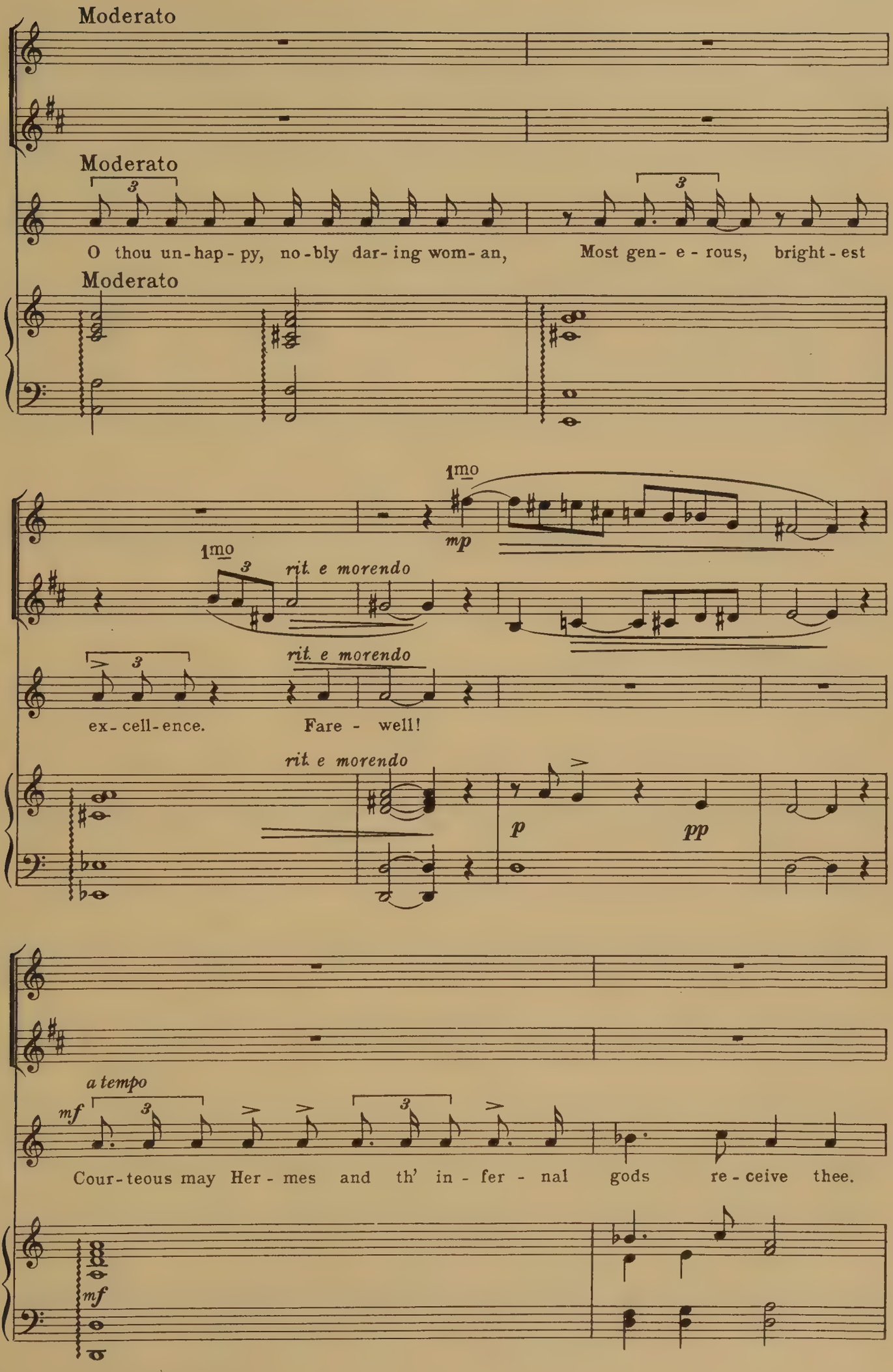
No6. Chorus

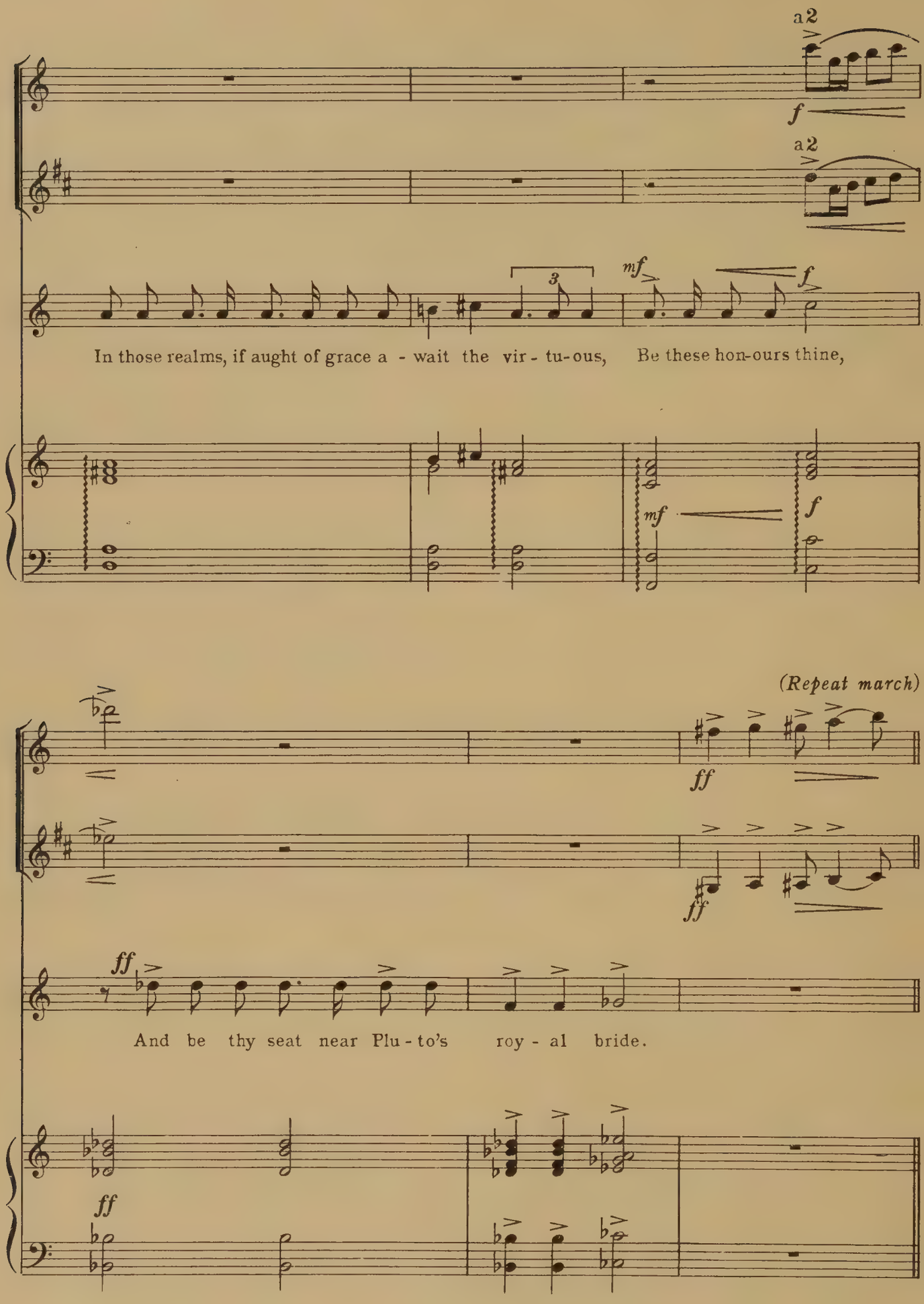
YES, LIB'RAL HOUSE WITH PRINCELY STATE




1mo
1mo
stows; — Yet wilt thou ope thy gate e'en now, E'en now wilt thou re-ceive this
guest, — Tho' from thine eyes the warm tears flow, Tho' sor-row rend thy
suff-'ring breast, Bright to the vir-tuous shall suc-cess a-rise.


Tempo di Marcia
a2
mf
a2
Tempo di Marcia
mf
Fine
Fine
D.C.
D.C.

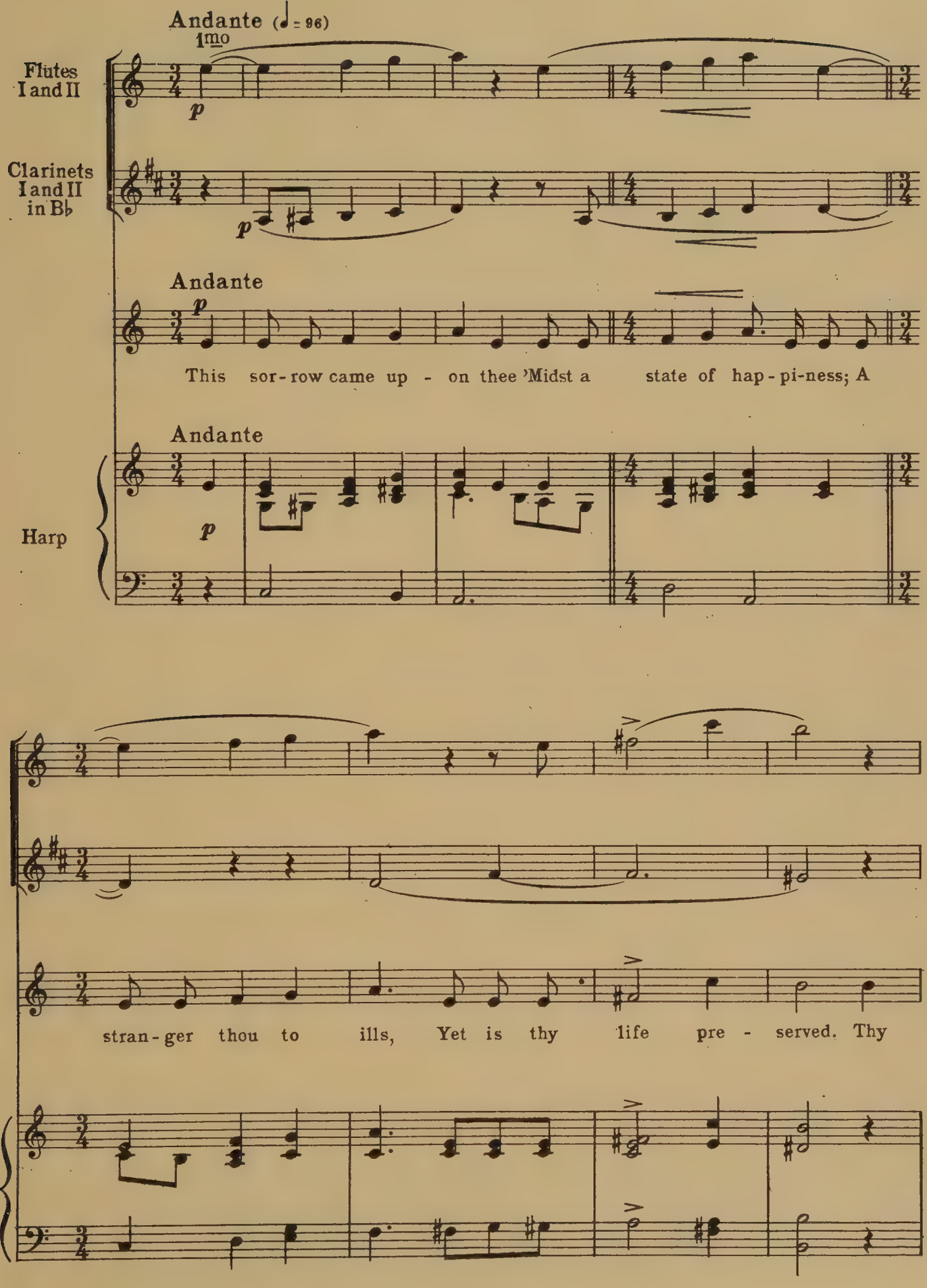

Moderato
Moderato
O thou un-hap-py, no-bly dar-ing wom-an, Most gen- e - rous, bright-est
Moderato
1mo
mp
1mo
rit. e morendo
rit. e morendo
ex-cell-ence. Fare - well!
rit. e morendo
p
pp
a tempo
mf
Cour-teous may Her - mes and th' in - fer - nal gods re-ceive thee.
mf

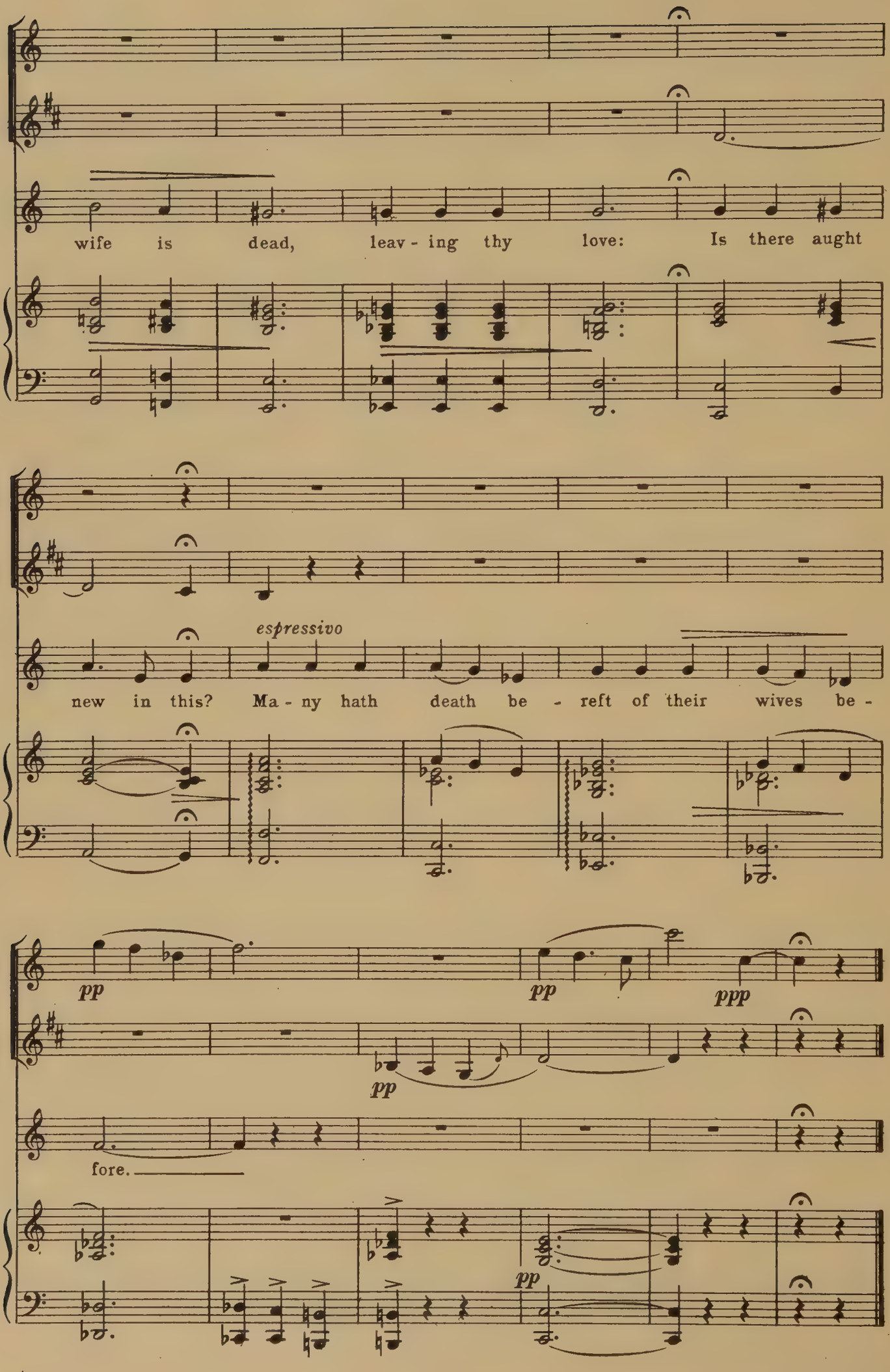


ADMETUS:— "For gorgeous robes — this black and mournful garb
Attends me to my hall and to my couch,
Where solitary sorrow waits me now."

No 7. Chorus

THIS SORROW CAME UPON THEE

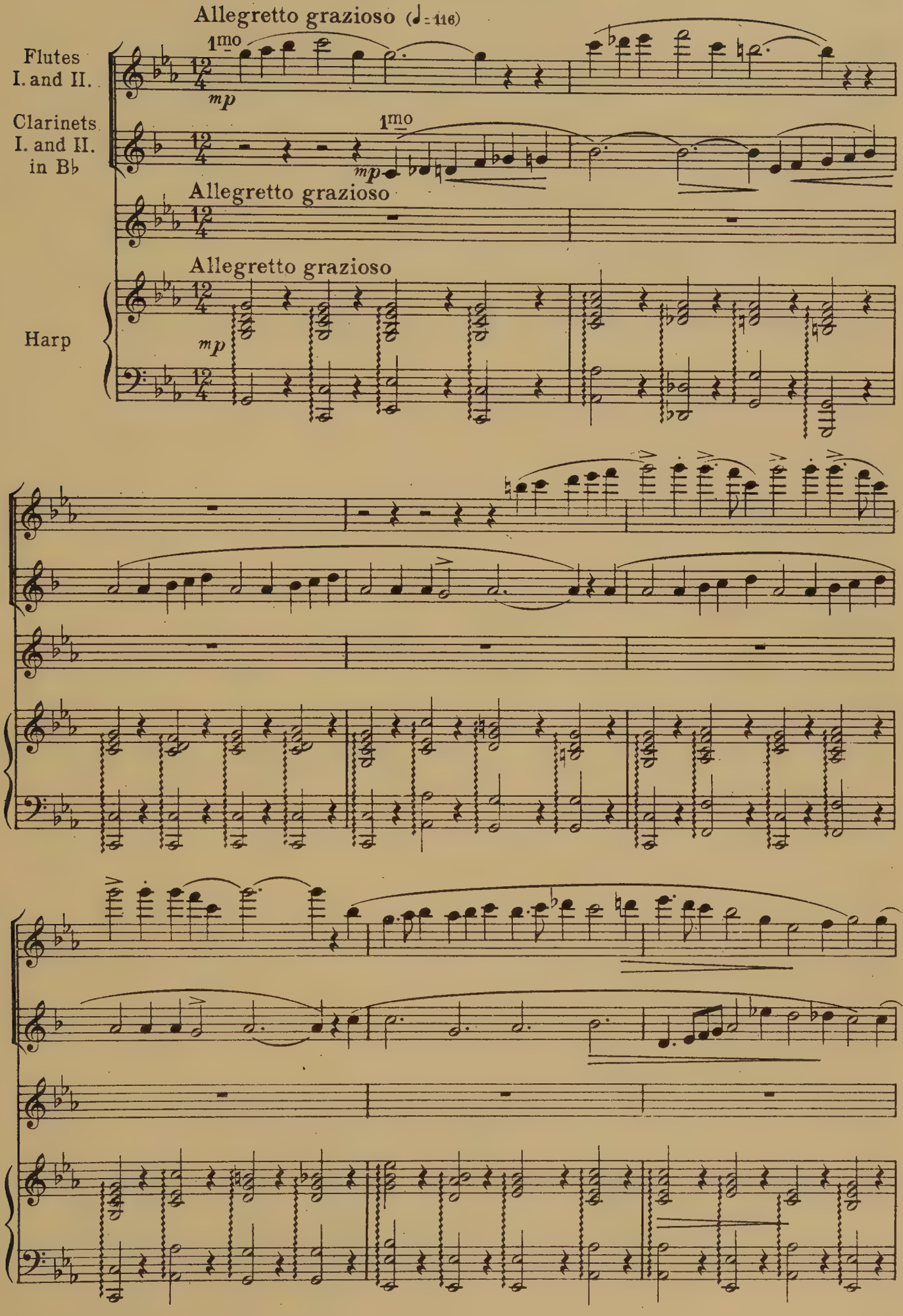


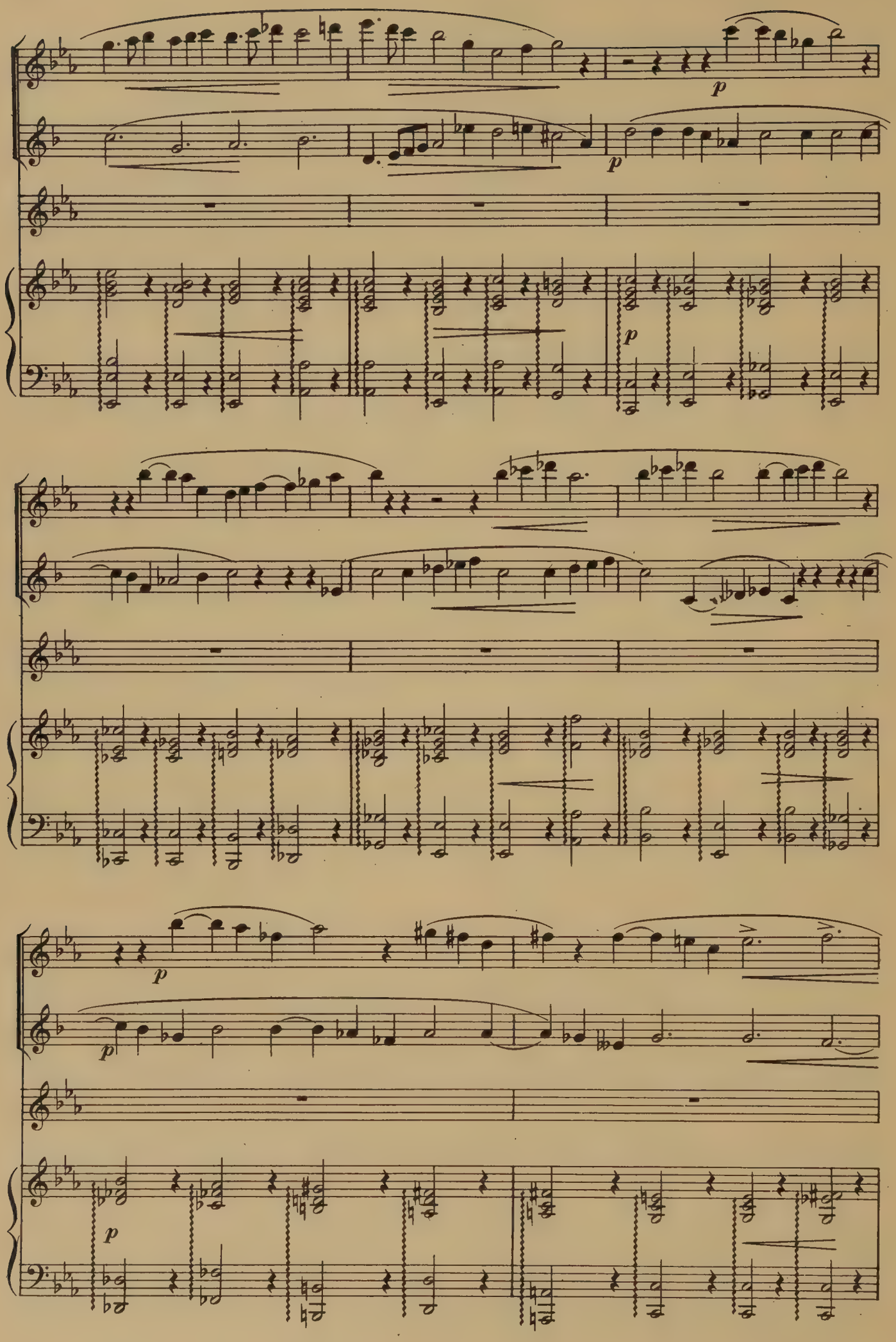

wife is dead, leav - ing thy love: Is there aught
espressivo
new in this? Ma - ny hath death be - reft of their wives be -
pp
pp
ppp
pp
fore.
pp

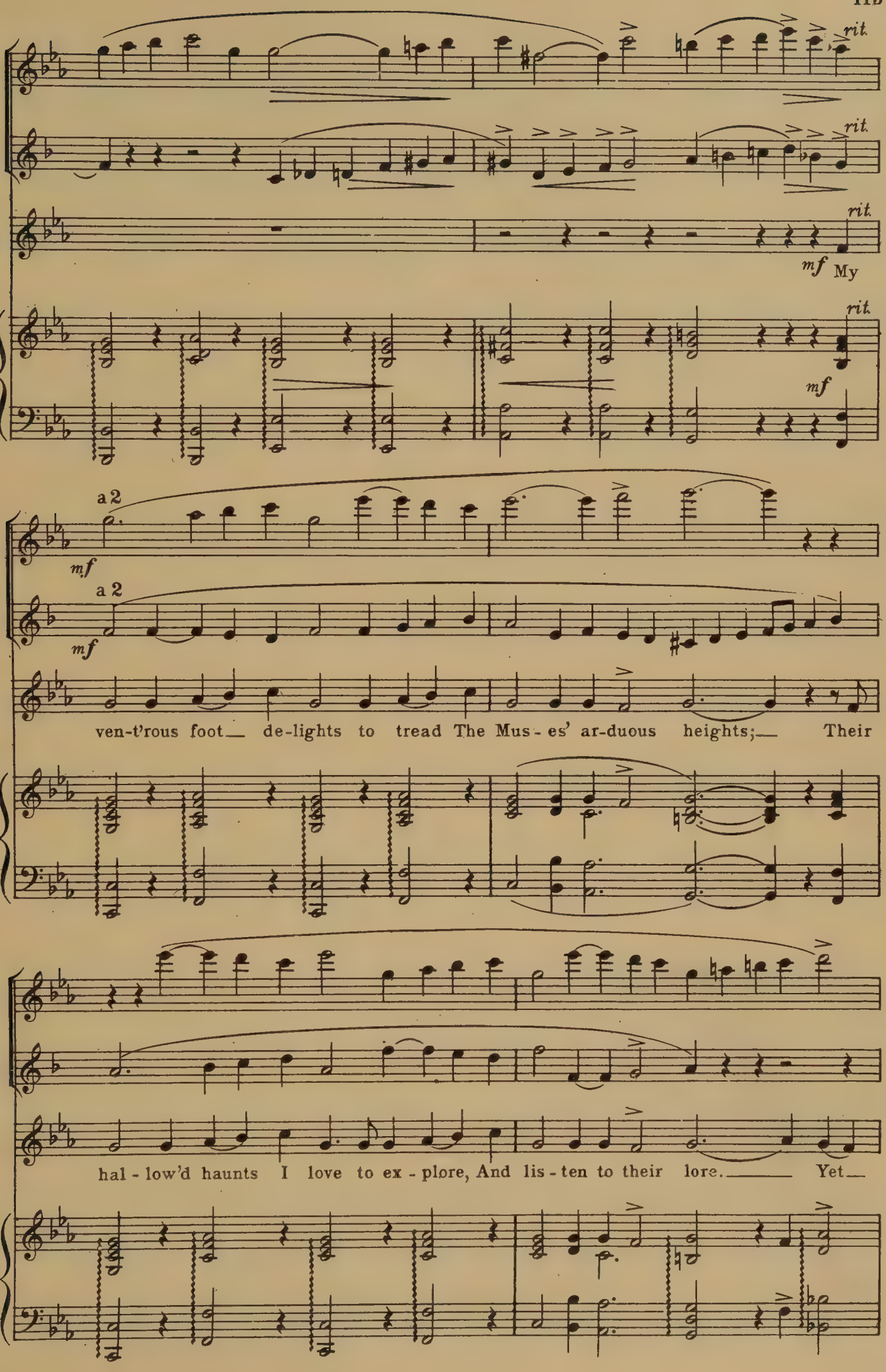
Nº 8. Chorus

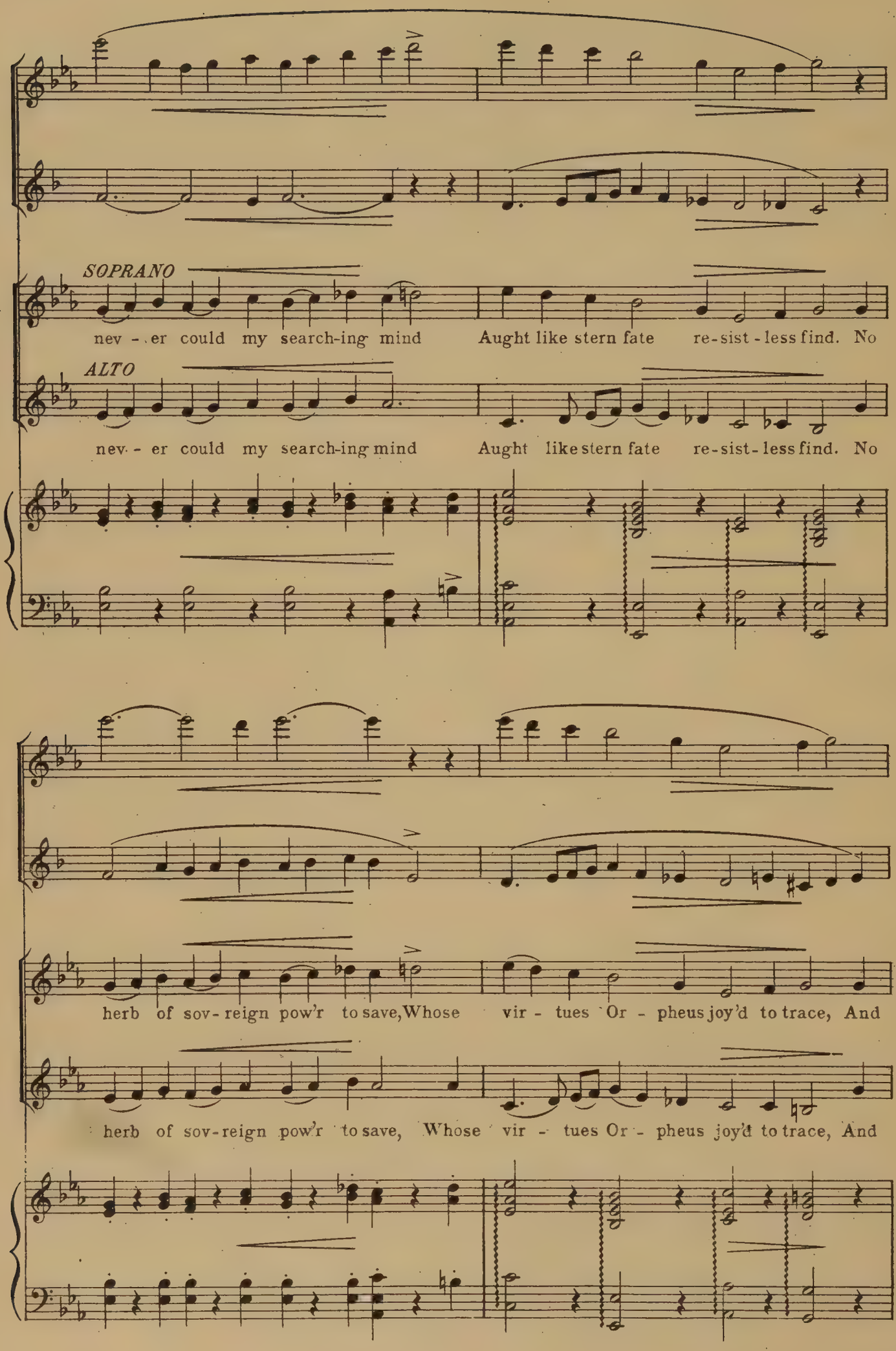
HYPORCHEME DANCE

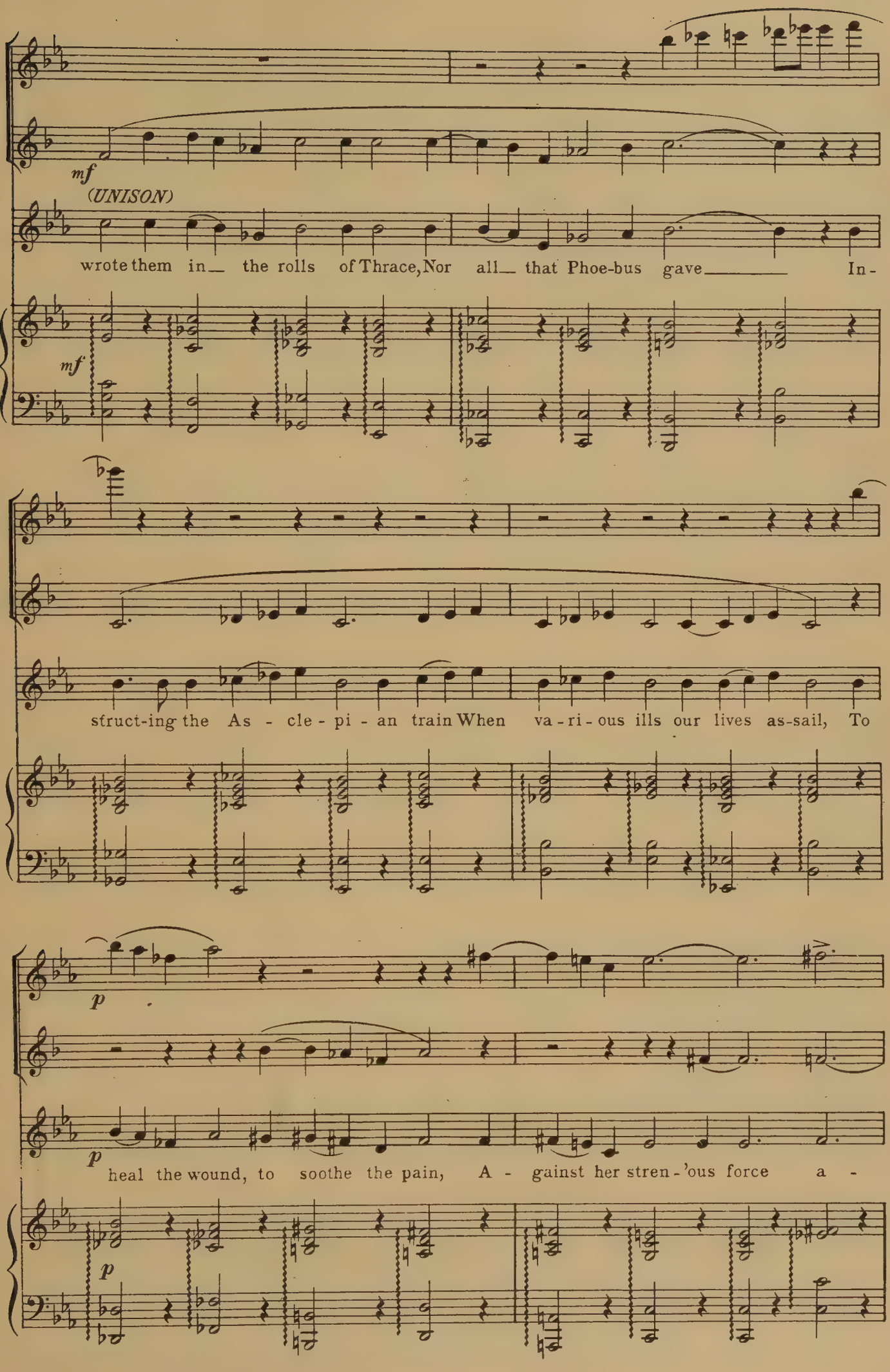
SONG: — "My vent'rous foot delights to tread"

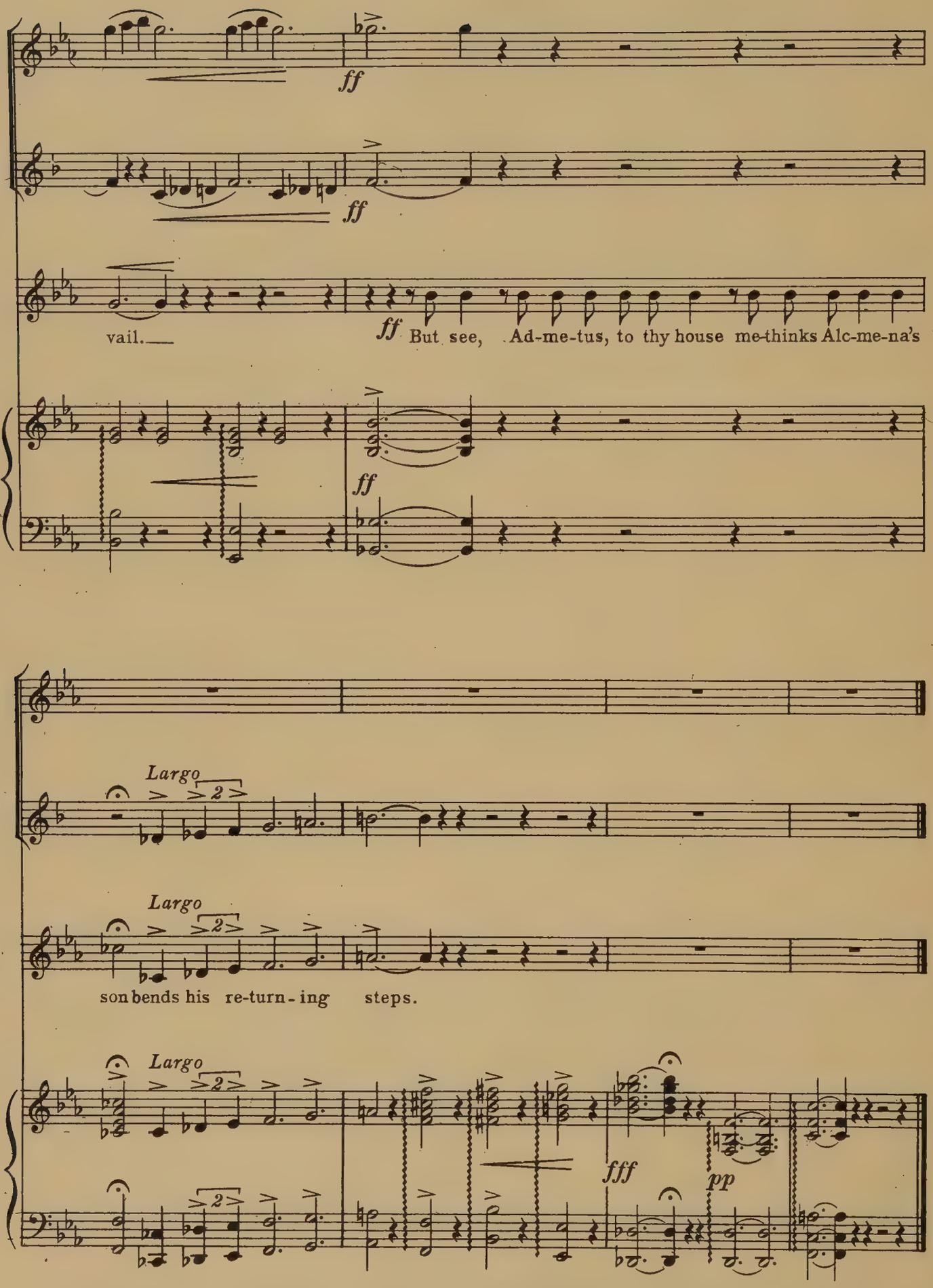



p
p
p
p
p
p


rit.
rit.
rit.
mf My
rit.
mf
a 2
mf
a 2
mf
ven-t'rous foot de-lights to tread The Mus-es' ar-duous heights; Their
hal-low'd haunts I love to ex-plore, And lis-ten to their lore. Yet


SOPRANO
nev - er could my search-ing mind Aught like stern fate re-sist-less find. No
ALTO
nev - er could my search-ing mind Aught like stern fate re-sist-less find. No
herb of sov-reign pow'r to save, Whose vir - tues Or - pheus joy'd to trace, And
herb of sov-reign pow'r to save, Whose vir - tues Or - pheus joy'd to trace, And

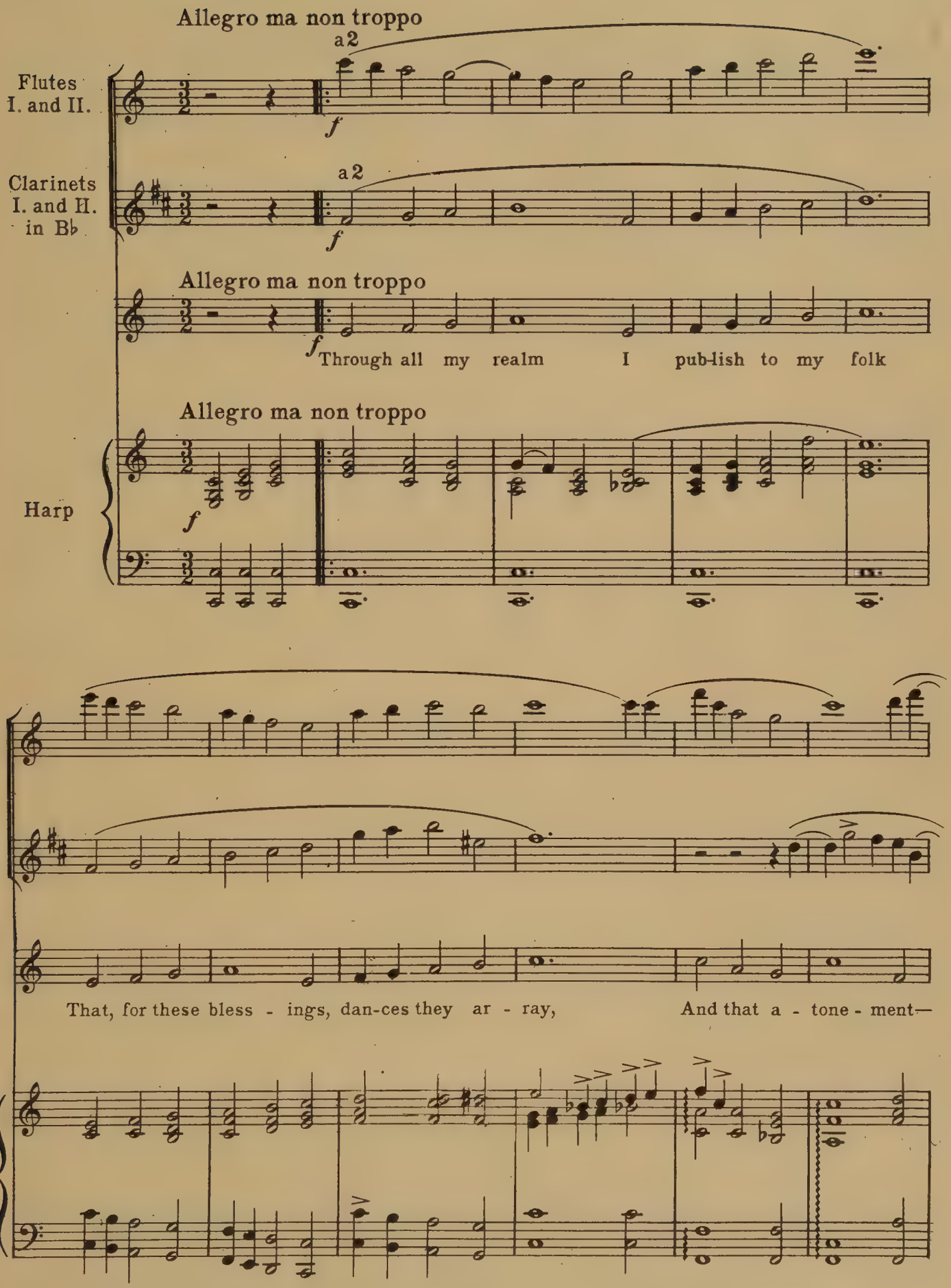

mf
(UNISON)
wrote them in_ the rolls of Thrace, Nor all_ that Phoe-bus gave_____ In-
mf
struct-ing the As - cle - pi - an train When va - ri - ous ills our lives as-sail, To
p
p
heal the wound, to soothe the pain, A - gainst her stren - 'ous force a -
p

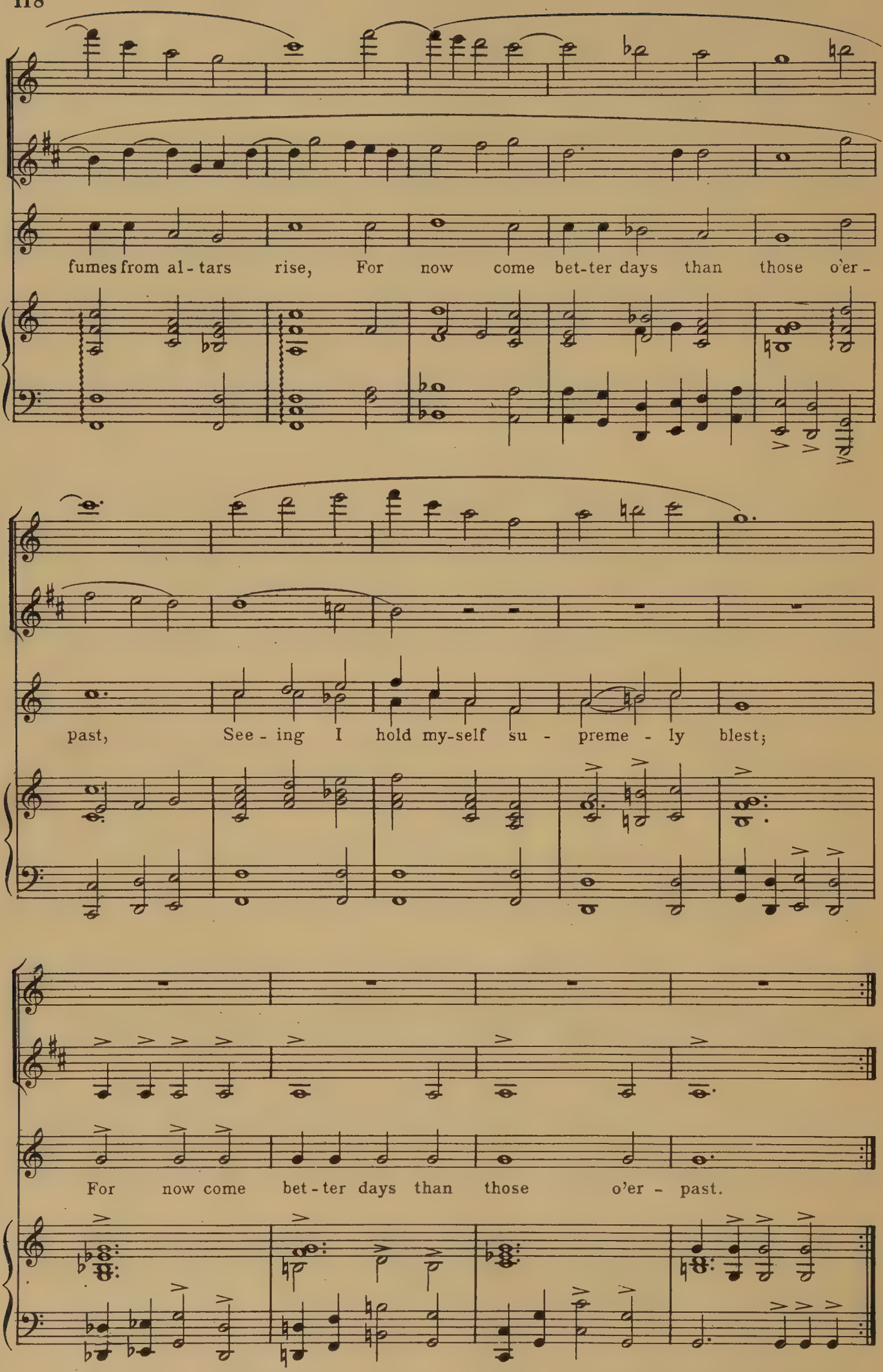


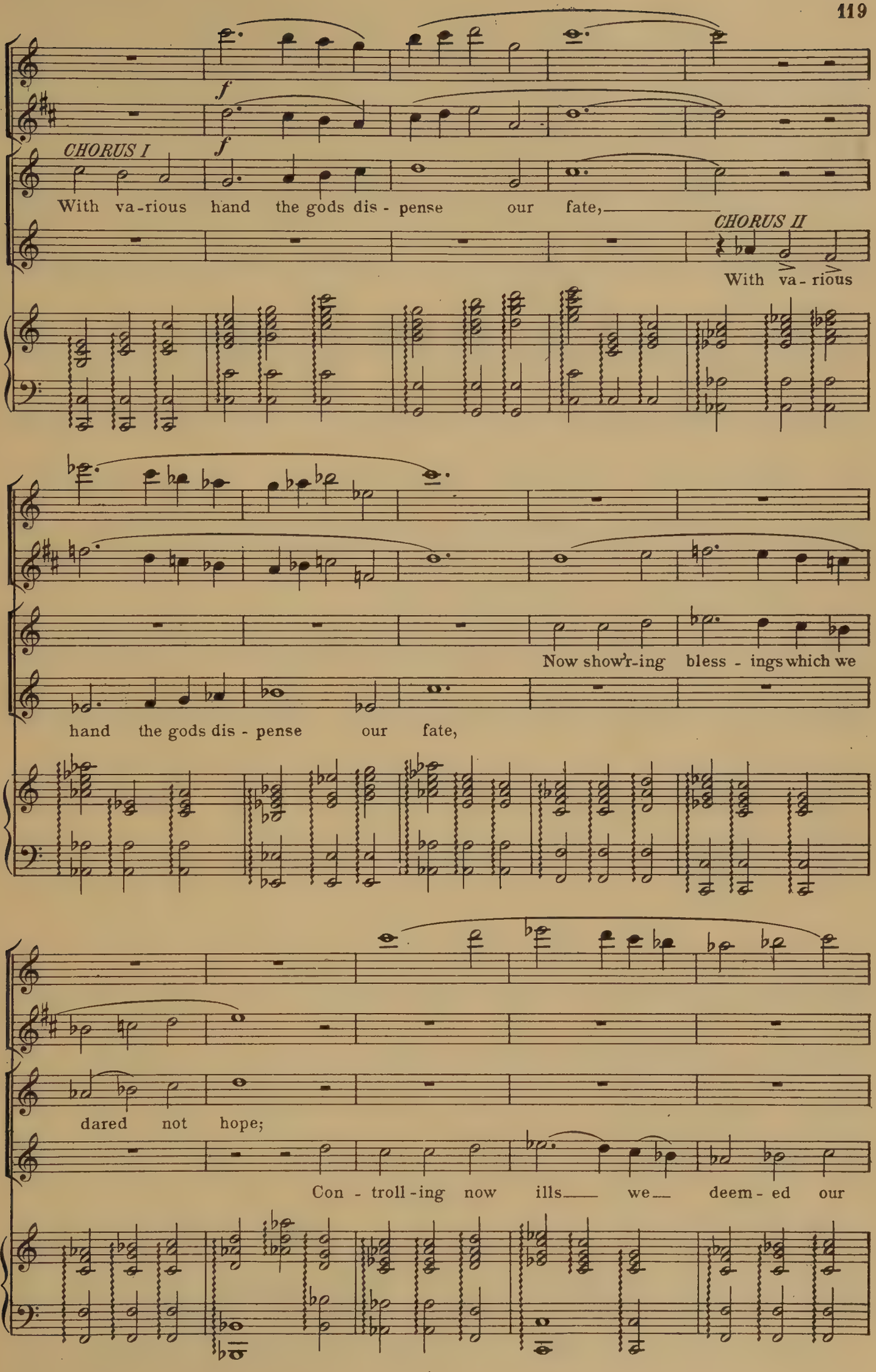
ADMETUS: "O prosper thou, and come again in peace!"

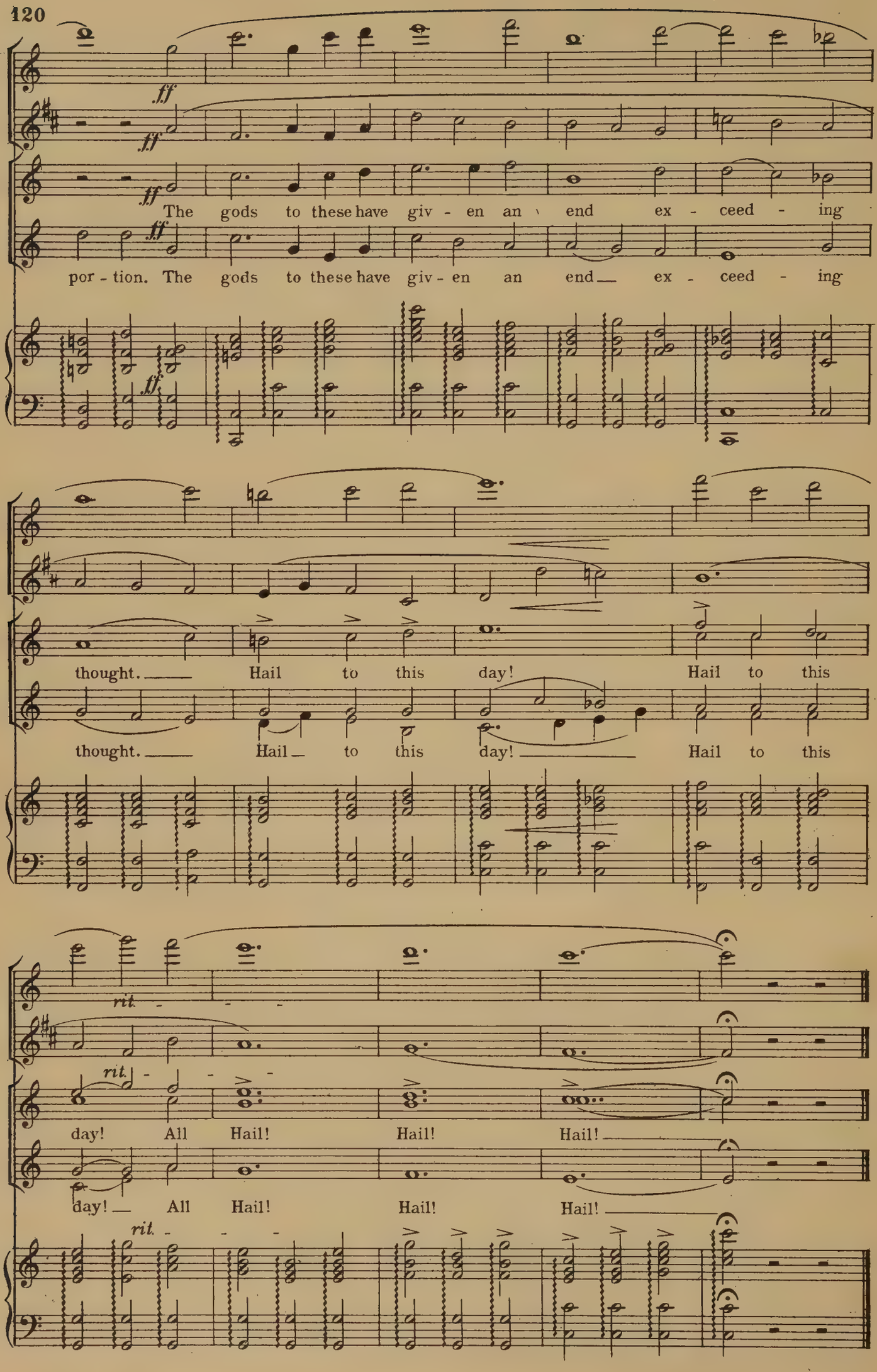
No9. Final Chorus

THROUGH ALL MY REALM




fumes from al - tars rise, For now come bet-ter days than those o'er -
past, See - ing I hold my-self su - preme - ly blest;
For now come bet - ter days than those o'er - past.


f
f
CHORUS I
With va-rious hand the gods dis - pense our fate,
CHORUS II
With va - rious
Now show'r-ing bless - ings which we
hand the gods dis - pense our fate,
dared not hope;
Con - troll-ing now ills we deem - ed our


ff
ff
ff
ff
The gods to these have giv - en an end ex - ceed - ing
por - tion. The gods to these have giv - en an end ex - ceed - ing
thought. Hail to this day! Hail to this
thought. Hail to this day! Hail to this
rit.
rit.
day! All Hail! Hail! Hail!
day! All Hail! Hail! Hail!
rit.

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